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Galaxy

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by
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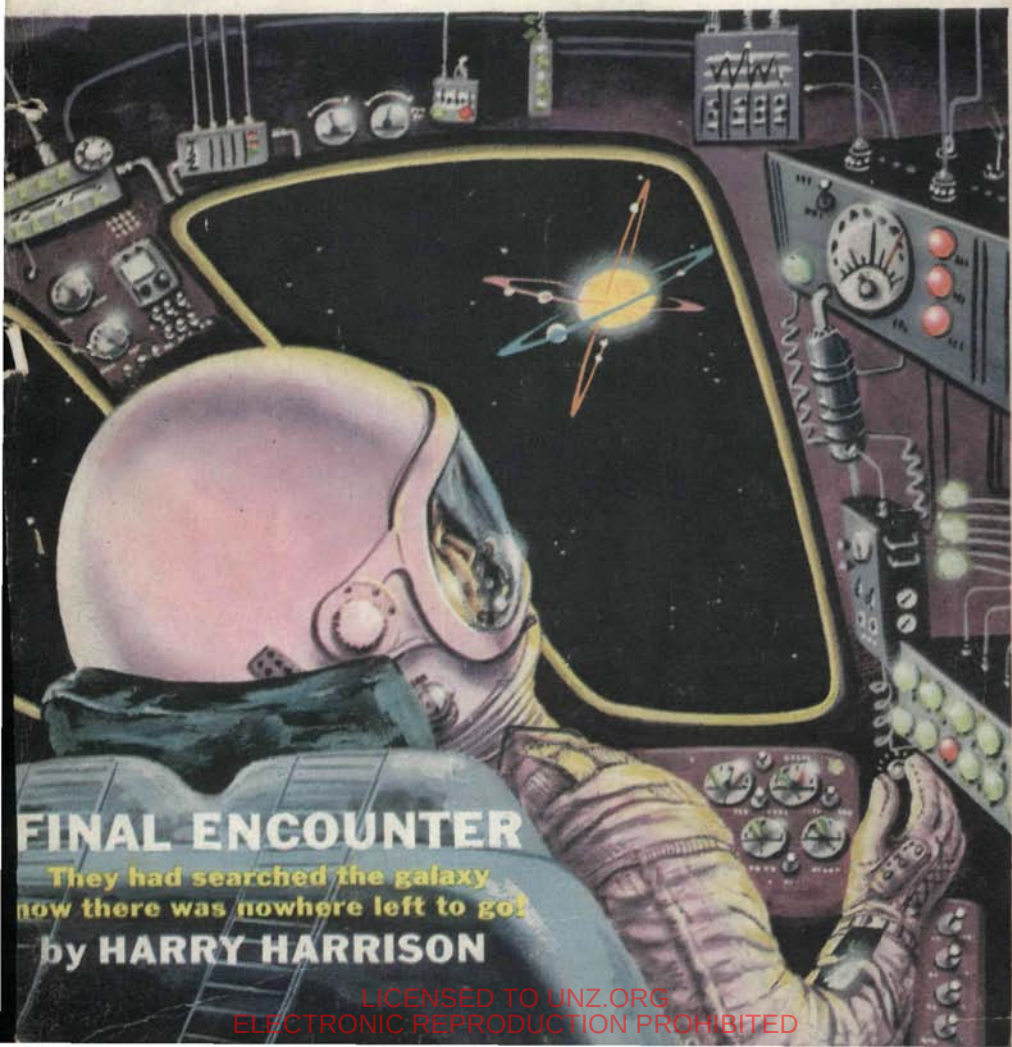
THE BOY WHO BOUGHT OLD EARTH
by CORDWAINER SMITH



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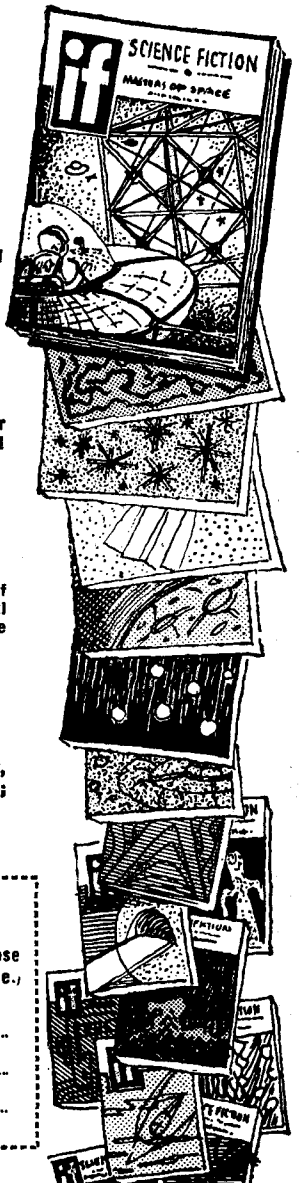

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Galaxy

MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1964 • Vol. 22, No. 4

CONTENTS

COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL

THE BOY WHO BOUGHT OLD EARTH .. 7
by Cordwainer Smith

NOVELETTES

FINAL ENCOUNTER 131
by Harry Harrison

THE BLASPHEMERS 164
by Philip Jose Farmer

SHORT STORIES

THE END OF THE RACE 127
by Albert Bermel

SOFT AND SOUPY WHISPERS 155
by Sydney Van Scyoc

SPECIAL FEATURES

EARTH EIGHTEEN 106
by Ernst Mason

AT THE FEELIES 152
by Jack Sharkey

SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION 120
by Willy Ley

FEATURES

EDITORIAL 4
by Frederik Pohl

FORECAST 194

Cover by DEMBER from FINAL ENCOUNTER

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How To Talk Science

Anybody who listens in on gatherings of scientific people must have begun to notice a dismaying lack of communication between Them and Us. It doesn't help much if We are also scientists, too — not unless we are in the same line, maybe not even then!

It isn't just a matter of words like deoxyribonucleic acid (*des*-oxyribonucleic acid? Depends on where you come from). The mind has evolved a technique for that sort of thing. It may not be able to translate for you, but it registers a sort of burst of static that conveys the message, *Unfamiliar term, meaning unknown*, or, *That one I don't dig, boss, but he sure talks pretty*. With luck you can then figure out some sort of meaning from the context. If you're not that lucky, at least you have the consolation that you may not know what they're talking about but at least you *know* you don't know it.

The real communications breakdown comes when the language sounds like something you *ought* to understand. "We were knitting all day, and when we got that cleaned up she started a cocktail party" sounds sensible enough . . . sort of. "We got to the white room but then we were nitpicking for half an hour and they couldn't hold the chill-down" is almost as deceptive. Or try: "As long as Stockpile was only two or three Kahns. I wasn't worried, but once it gets up near a Beach there's trouble, right?" "Right," you nod, and ask if anybody's seen the new batting order for the San Francisco Giants.

Of course, all this may be *en claire* for you. If you're a cyberneticist you may know that the first example refers to the bugs computers develop — according to N. Zvegintzov, "knitting" is the process of repetitively punching tape, while a readout that is pure gibberish is called a "cocktail party." (Figures!) Anybody around Cape Kennedy knows

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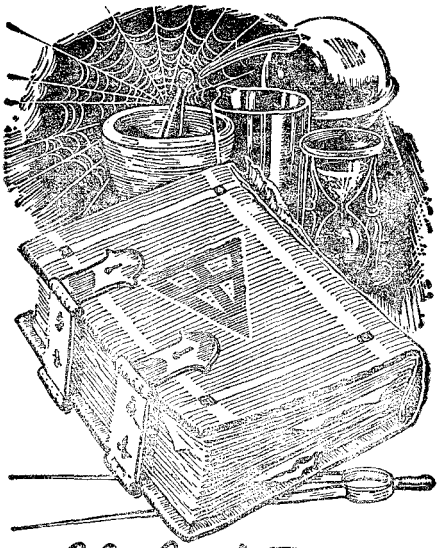

Secrets entrusted to a few

The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—*things you ought to know.* Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power* and *accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of *the hidden processes of man's mind,* and *the mastery of life's problems.* Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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that a nitpicking hold is one in which assorted minor flaws are fixed, the white room is the last staging area before the astronaut enters his vehicle and a chill-down is the process of keeping liquid gases liquid. Those who attended the Pugwash conferences might recognize the Beach as that quantity of nuclear weapons which will kill half the Earth's population by fallout (courtesy of course, of Nevil Shute), a Kahn that smaller quantity sufficient to annihilate any given country (one Beach equals about 300 Kahns), and a Stockpile is a variable representing actual quantity of nuclear weapons in being in the world at any particular time. (These terms are taken from Freeman J. Dyson, writing in The Bulletin *of the Atomic Scientists.*)

No doubt some such shorthand is needed. You can't expect the Cape Kennedy people to call one of their body-function telemeters an extinctospectroppolariscopeoculogyrogravoadaptometer, so they call it a V-meter and everybody's happy. If you want to distinguish between the thrust of rapid acceleration from the rear and rapid acceleration from the front, it's fair enough to term the first "eyeballs in" and the second "eyeballs out". What does a panel of hull metal look like? Why, like an elephant's ear — more or less — and so that is what it is called. And no doubt a special name is needed for the kind of toothache caused by rapid changes in air pressure experienced by astronauts ejected from their capsules. If so, aerodontalgia is undoubtedly as good a name for it as any. (These aerospace terms we found in Martin Caidin's *Man-in-Space Dictionary.*)

But it's all going too far, if you ask us. The trouble is, we're running out of words.

Maybe Johnathan Swift had a good idea. His Laputans didn't use words at all, but carried on their backs an assortment of all objects they might wish to discuss. If they wanted to convey "apple", they pointed to a real apple. Similarly there isn't any need to invent a term like poly-fluxpicated cisducer" when you can just point to the widget in question and say, "You know, that thing there."

Of course, this might seriously cut down shop-talk away from the actual scene of work — a bevatron isn't normally the kind of thing one carries to a faculty tea.

But what's wrong with that?

FREDERIK POHL

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THE BOY WHO BOUGHT OLD EARTH

Complete Short Novel

by CORDWAINER SMITH

ILLUSTRATED BY MORROW

The Old Norstrilians weren't exactly hostile to the rest of humanity—they just didn't want to bother with them!

PRELUDE

Later, much later, people forgot how Rod McBan had bought the whole Planet Earth without even knowing that he had done it. They remembered the extraneous things, like the Council of Thieves chartering whole fleets to intercept Rod on his way between Old North Australia and Earth. They remem-

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bered the little ballad which had been made up for the Chief of Thieves at about that time:

Arson for the arsenal,
Money in the money-bags
Parson in the parsonage,
And the girl for me!

(They even explained that a parsonage was a vital statistics computer and the parson was its input screen.)

The real drama remained untold.

What had driven a rich, mysterious boy to gamble everything — perhaps even his life — from the richest planet in the galaxy in order to buy Earth? What could he have possibly done with Earth if he did get it?

You have to understand something of Old North Australia (familiarly called "Norstrilia") to see how he did it.

You have to understand why a lot of the young died young.

Then you get the pitch of it and you have the real story, the inside story, the original history — not just a cartoon of a handsome yellow-haired boy standing with his arms full of megacredit papers.

He never held them, anyhow. He couldn't have held them. There were too many. This boy had bought Earth, Manhome itself, the Earthport tower, the oceans, everything. You couldn't get the paper titles of all that stuff into one person's room, much less into his arms.

So let's go back to the beginnings, and start with Old North Australia.

I

Story, place and time — these are the essentials.

The story is simple. There was a boy who bought the planet Earth. We know that, to our cost. It only happened once, and we have taken pains that it will never happen again. He came to Earth, got what he wanted and got away alive, in a series of very remarkable adventures. That's the story.

The place? That's Old North Australia. What other place could it be? Where else do the farmers pay ten million credits for a handkerchief, five million for a bottle of beer? Where else do people lead peaceful lives, untouched by militarism, on a world which is boobytrapped with death and things worse than death? Old North Australia has stroon — the santaclara drug — and more than a thousand other planets clamor for it. But you can get stroon only from Norstrilia, because it is a virus which grows on enormous, gigantic, misshapen sheep. The sheep were taken from Earth to

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start a pastoral system; they ended up as the greatest of imaginable treasures. The simple farmers became simple billionaires, but they kept their farming ways. They started tough and they got tougher.

People get pretty mean if you rob them and hurt them for almost three thousand years. They get obstinate. They avoid strangers, except for sending out spies and a very occasional tourist. They don't mess with other people and they're death, death inside out and turned over twice, if you mess with them.

Then one of their kids showed up on Earth and bought it. The whole place, lock, stock and underpeople.

That was a real embarrassment for Earth.

And for Norstrilia, too.

If it had been the two governments, Norstrilia would have collected all the eye-teeth on earth and sold them back at compound interest. That's the way Norstrilians do business. Or they might have said, "Skip it, cobber. You can keep your wet old ball. We've got a nice dry world of our own." That's the temper they have. Unpredictable.

But a kid had bought Earth, and it was his.

Legally he had the right to pump up the Sunset Ocean, shoot it into space and sell water all over the inhabited galaxy.

He didn't.

He wanted something else.

The Earth authorities thought it was girls, so they tried to throw girls at him of all shapes, sizes, smells and ages — all the way from young ladies of good family down to undergirls who smelled of romance all the time, except for the first five minutes after they had had hot antiseptic showers. But he didn't want girls. He wanted postage stamps.

That baffled both Earth and Norstrilia. The Norstrilians are a hard people from a harsh planet, and they think highly of property. (Why shouldn't they? They have most of it.) A story like this could only have started in Norstrilia.

What's Norstrilia

Somebody once singsonged it up, like this:

"Gray lay the land, oh. Gray grass from sky to sky. Not near the weir, dear. Not a mountain, low or high — only hills and gray gray. Watch the dappled dimpled twinkles blooming on the star bar.

"That is Norstrilia.

"All the muddy glubbery is gone — all the poverty, the waiting and the pain. People fought their way away from monstrous forms. People fought for hands

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and noses, eyes and feet, man and woman. They got it all back again. Back they came from daylight nightmares, centuries when monstrous men, sucking the water around the pools, dreamed of being men again. They found it. Men they were again, again, far away from a horrid *when*.

"The sheep, poor beasties, did not make it. Out of their sickness they distilled immortality for man. Who says research could do it? Research, besmirch! It was a pure accident. Smack up an accident, man, and you've got it made.

"Beige-brown sheep lie on blue-gray grass while the clouds rush past, low overhead, like iron pipes ceilinging the world.

"Take your pick of sick sheep, man, it's the sick that pays. Sneeze me a planet, man, or cough me up a spot of life-forever. If it's barmy there, where the noddies and trolls like you live, it's too right here.

"That's the book, boy.

"If you haven't seen it, you haven't seen Norstrilia. If you did see it, you wouldn't believe it. If you got there, you wouldn't get off alive.

"Mother Hitton's littul kittons wait for you down there. Little pets they are, little little little pets. Cute little things, they say. Don't you believe it. No man ever saw them and walked away alive. You won't either. That's the final dash, flash. That's the utter clobber, cobber.

"Charts call the place Old North Australia."

We can suppose that that is what it is like in this time, the first century of the Rediscovery of Man. When C'mell lived. About the time they polished off Shayol, like wiping an apple on the sleeve. Long deep into our own time. Fifteen thousand years after the bombs went up and the boom came down on Old, Old Earth.

Recent, see?

What happens in the story? Read it.

Who's there?

It starts with Rod McBan — who had the real name of Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBan. But you can't tell a story if you call the main person by a name as long as Roderick Frederick Arnold William MacArthur McBan. You have to do what his neighbors did — call him Rod McBan. The old ladies always said, "Rod McBan to the hundred and fifty-first . . ." and then sighed. Flurp a squirt at them, friends. We don't need numbers. We know his family was distinguished. We know the poor kid was born to troubles.

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He was born to inherit the Station of Doom.

He almost failed the Garden of Death.

The Onseck was after him.

His father had died out in the dirty part of space, where people never find nice clean deaths.

When he got in trouble, he trusted his computer.

The computer gambled, and it won Earth.

He went to Earth.

That was history itself — *that* and C'mell beside him.

At long, long last he got his rights and he came home.

That's the story. Except for the details.

They follow.

II

Rod McBan faced the day of days. He knew what it was all about, but he could not really feel it. He wondered if they had tranquilized him with half-refined stroon, a product so rare and precious that it was never, never sold off-planet.

He knew that by nightfall he would be laughing and giggling and drooling in one of the Dying Rooms, where the unfit were put away to thin out the human breed, or else he would stand forth as the oldest landholder on the planet, Chief Heir to the Station of Doom. The farm had been salvaged by his great 32-grandfather, almost two thousand years ago, and it was called Doom when he first inherited it. But the great 32-grandfather had bought an ice-asteroid, crashed it into the farm over the violent objections of his neighbors and learned clever tricks with artesian wells which kept his grass growing while the neighbors' fields turned from gray-green to blowing dust. The McBans had kept the sarcastic old name for their farming station, the Station of Doom.

By night, Rod knew, the Station would be his.

Or he would be dying, giggling his way to death in the killing place where people laughed and grinned and rollicked about while they died.

He found himself humming a bit of a rhyme that had always been a part of the tradition of Old North Australia:

We kill to live, and die to grow —
That's the way the world must go!

He'd been taught, bone deep, that his own world was a very special world, envied, loved, hated and dreaded across the galaxy. He knew that he was part of a very special people. Other races and kinds of men farmed crops, or raised food, or designed machines, and manufactured weapons. Norstrilians

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did none of these things. From their dry fields, their sparse wells, their enormous sick sheep, they refined immortality itself.

And sold it for a high, high price.

Rod McBan walked a little way into the yard. His home lay behind him. It was a log cabin built out of Daimoni beams — beams uncuttable, unchangeable, solid beyond all expectations of solidity. They had been purchased as a matched set thirty-odd planet-hops away and brought to Old North Australia by photosails. The cabin was a fort which could withstand even major weapons, but it was still a cabin, simple inside and with a front yard of scuffed dust.

The last red bit of dawn was whitening into day.

Rod knew that he could not go far.

He could hear the women out behind the house, the kinswomen who had come to barber and groom him for the triumph — or the other.

They never knew how much he knew. Because of his affliction, they had thought around him for years, counting on his telepathic deafness to be constant. Trouble was, it wasn't; lots of times he heard things.

He even remembered the sad little poem they had about the young people who failed to pass the test for one reason or another and had to go to the Dying House instead of coming forth as Norstrilian citizens and fully recognized subjects of Her-majesty-the-queen. (Norstrilians had not had a real queen for some fifteen thousand years, but they were strong on tradition and did not let mere facts boggle them.) How did the little poem run, "This is the house of the long ago. . ."? In its own gloomy way it was cheerful.

He erased his own footprint from the dust and suddenly he remembered the whole thing. He chanted it softly to himself.

This is the house of the long ago,
Where the old ones murmur an endless woe,
Where the pain of time is an actual pain
And things once known always come again.
Out in the garden of death, our young
Have tasted the valiant taste of fear;
With muscular arm and reckless tongue,
They have won and lost and escaped us here.
This is the house of the long ago.
Those who die young do not enter here.
Those loving on know that hell is near.
The old ones who suffer have willed it so.
Out in the garden of death, the old
Look with awe at the young and bold.

It was all right to say that they looked with awe at the young and bold, but he hadn't met a person yet who did not prefer life to death. He'd heard about people who chose death

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— of course he had — who hadn't? But the experience was third-hand, fourth-hand, fifth-hand.

He knew that some people had said of him that he would be better off dead, just because he had never learned to communicate telepathically and had to use old spoken words like outworlders or barbarians.

Rod himself certainly didn't think he would be better dead.

Indeed, he sometimes looked at normal people and wondered how they managed to go through life with the constant silly chatter of other people's thoughts running through their minds. In the times that his mind lifted, so that he could "hier" for a while, he knew that hundreds or thousands of minds rattled in on him with unbearable clarity; he could even "hier" the minds that thought they had their telepathic shields up. Then, in a little while, the merciful cloud of his handicap came down on his mind again and he had a deep unique privacy which everybody on Old North Australia should have envied.

His computer had said to him once, "The words *hier* and *spiek* are corruptions of the words *hear* and *speak*. They are always pronounced in the second rising tone of voice, as though you were asking a question under the pressure of amusement and alarm, if you say the words with your voice. They refer only to telepathic communication between persons or between persons and underpeople."

"What are underpeople?" he had asked.

"Animals modified to speak, to understand, and usually to look like men. They differ from cerebrocentered robots in that the robots are built around an actual animal mind, but are mechanical and electronic relays, while underpeople are composed entirely of Earth-derived living tissue."

"Why haven't I ever seen one?'

"They are not allowed on Norstrilia at all, unless they are in the service of the defense establishments of the Commonwealth."

"Why are we called a Commonwealth, when all the other places are called worlds or planets?"

"Because you people are subjects of the Queen of England."

"Who is the Queen of England?"

"She was an Earth ruler in the Most Ancient Days, more than fifteen thousand years ago."

"Where is she now?"

"I said," said the computer, "that it was fifteen thousand years ago."

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"I know it," Rod had insisted, "but if there hasn't been any Queen of England for fifteen thousand years, how can we be her subjects?"

"I know the answer in human words," the reply had come from the friendly red machine, "but since it makes no sense to me, I shall have to quote it to you as people told it to me. 'She bloody well might turn up one of these days. Who knows? This is Old North Australia out here among the stars and we can dashed well wait for our own Queen. She might have been off on a trip when Old Old Earth went sour.'" The computer had clucked a few times in its odd ancient voice and had then said hopefully, in its toneless voice, "Could you re-state that so that I could program it as part of my memory-assembly?"

"It doesn't mean much to me. Next time I can hier other minds thinking I'll try to pick it out of somebody else's head."

That had been about a year ago, and Rod had never run across the answer.

Last night he had asked the computer more urgently.

"Will I die tomorrow?"

"Question irrelevant. No answer available."

"Computer!" he had shouted, "you know I love you."

"You say so."

"I started your historical assembly up after repairing you when that part had been thinkless for hundreds of years."

"Correct."

"I crawled down into this cave and found the *personal* controls where great[14] - grandfather had left them when they became obsolete."

"Correct."

"I'm going to die tomorrow and you won't even be sorry."

"I did not say that," said the computer.

"Don't you care?"

"I was not programmed to care. Since you yourself repaired me, Rod, you ought to know that I am the only all-mechanical computer functioning in this part of the galaxy. I am sure that if I had emotions I would be very sorry indeed. It is an extreme probability, since you are my only companion. But I do not have emotions. I have numbers, facts, language and memory — that is all."

"What is the probability, then, that I will die tomorrow in the Giggle Room?"

"That is not the right name. It is the Dying House."

"All right, then, the Dying House."

"The judgment on you will be a contemporary human judgment based upon emotions. Since

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I do not know the individuals concerned, I cannot make a prediction of any value at all."

"What do you think is going to happen to me, computer?"

"I do not really think. I respond. I have no input on that topic."

"Do you know anything at all about my life and death tomorrow? I know I can't *spiek* with my mind, but have to make sounds with my mouth instead. Why should they kill me for that?"

"I do not know the people concerned and therefore I do not know the reasons," the computer had replied, "but I know the history of Old North Australia down to your great[14]-grandfather's time."

"Tell me that, then," Rod had said. He had squatted in the cave which he had discovered, listening to the forgotten set of computer controls which he had repaired, and had heard again the story of Old North Australia as his great[14]-grandfather had understood it. Stripped of personal names and actual dates, it was a simple story.

This morning his life hung on it.

Norstrilia had to thin out its people if it were going to keep its Old Old Earth character and be another Australia, out among the stars. Otherwise the fields would fill up, the deserts turn into apartment houses, the sheep die in cellars under endless kennels for crowded and useless people. No Old North Australian wanted that to happen, when he could keep character, immortality and wealth — in that particular order of importance. It would be contrary to the character of Norstrilia.

The simple character of Norstrilia was immutable — as immutable as anything out among the stars. This ancient Commonwealth was the only human institution older than the Instrumentality.

III

The story was simple, the way the computer's clear long-circuited brain had sorted it out.

Take a farmer culture straight off Old Old Earth — Manhome itself.

Put the culture on a remote planet.

Touch it with prosperity and blight it with drought.

Teach it sickness, deformity, hardihood. Make it learn poverty so bad that men sold one child to buy another child the drink of water which would give it an extra day of life while the drills whirred deep into the dry rock, looking for wetness.

Teach that culture thrift, med-

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kine, scholarship, pain, survival.

Give those people the lessons of poverty, war, grief, greed, magnanimity, piety, hope and despair by turn.

Let the culture survive — survive disease, deformity, despair, desolation, abandonment.

Then give it the happiest accident in the history of time.

Out of sheep-sickness came infinite riches, the santaclara drug or "stroon" which prolonged human life indefinitely. Prolonged it — but with queer side-effects, so that most Norstrilians preferred to die in a thousand years or so.

Norstrilia was convulsed by the discovery. So was every other inhabited world. But the drug could not be synthesized, paralleled, duplicated. It was something which could be obtained only from the sick sheep on the Old North Australian plains.

Robbers and governments tried to steal the drug. Now and then they succeeded, long ago, but they hadn't made it since the time of Rod's great[19]-grandfather.

They had tried to steal the sheep.

Several had been taken off the planet. The Fourth Battle of New Alice, in which half the menfolk of Norstrilia had died beating off the Bright Empire, had led to the abduction of two of the sick sheep — one female and one male. The Bright Empire thought it had won. It hadn't. The sheep got well, produced healthy lambs, exuded no more stroon and died. The Bright Empire had paid four battle fleets for a coldbox full of mutton, and the monopoly remained in Norstrilia.

The Norstrilians exported the santaclara drug, and they put the export on a systematic basis.

They achieved almost infinite riches.

The poorest man on Norstrilia was always richer than the richest man anywhere else, emperors and conquerors included. Every farm-hand earned at least a hundred Earth megacredits a day — measured in real money on Old Earth, not in paper which had to travel at steep arbitrage.

But the Norstrilians made their choice: *the* choice —

To remain themselves.

They taxed themselves back into simplicity.

Luxury goods got a tax of 20,000,000%. For the price of fifty palaces on Olympia, you could import a handkerchief into Norstrilia. A pair of shoes, landed, cost the price of a hundred yachts in orbit. All machines were prohibited, except for defense and the drug-gathering. Underpeople were never made

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on Norstrilia, and imported only by the defense authority for top secret reasons. Old North Australia remained simple, pioneer, fierce, open.

Many families emigrated to enjoy their wealth; they could not return.

But the population problem remained, even with the taxation and simplicity and hard work.

Cut back, then — cut back people if you must.

But how, whom, where? Birth control — beastly. Sterilization — inhuman, unmanly, un-British. (This last was an ancient word meaning "very bad indeed.")

By families, then. Let the families have the children. Let the Commonwealth test them at sixteen. If they ran under the standards, send them to a happy, happy death.

But what about the families? You can't wipe a family out, not in a conservative farmer society, when the neighbors are folk who have fought and died beside you for a hundred generations. The Rule of Exceptions came. Any family which reached the end of its line could have the last surviving heir re-processed — up to four times. If he failed, it was the Dying House for the boy, and a designated adopted heir from another family took over the name and the estate.

Otherwise their survivors would have gone on, in this century a dozen, in that century twenty. Soon Norstrilia would have been divided into two classes, the sound ones and a privileged class of hereditary freaks. This they could not stand, not while the space around them stank of danger, not when men a hundred worlds away dreamed and died while thinking of how to steal the stroon. They had to be fighters, and they chose not to be soldiers or emperors. Therefore they *had* to be fit, alert, healthy, clever, simple and moral. They had to be better than any possible enemy or any possible combination of enemies.

They made it.

Old North Australia became the toughest, brightest, simplest world in the galaxy. One by one, without weapons, Norstrilians could tour the other worlds and kill almost anything which attacked them. Governments feared them. Ordinary people hated them or worshipped them. Off-world men eyed their women queerly. The Instrumentality left them alone, or defended them without letting them know. (As in the case of Raumsog, who brought his whole world to a death of cancer and volcanoes,

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because the Golden Ship struck once.)

Norstrilian mothers learned to stand by with dry eyes when their children, unexpectedly drugged if they failed the tests, drooled with pleasure and went giggling away to their deaths.

The space and sub-space around Norstrilia became sticky and sparky with the multiplicity of their defenses. Big outdoorsy men sailed tiny fighting craft around the approaches to Old North Australia. When people met them in outports, they always thought that Norstrilians looked simple, but the looks were a snare and a delusion. The Norstrilians had been conditioned by thousands of years of unprovoked attack. They looked as simple as sheep, but their minds were as subtle as serpents.

And now — Rod McBan.

The last heir, the very last heir, of their proudest old family had been found a half-freak. He was normal enough by Earth standards, but by Norstrilian measure he was inadequate. He was a bad, bad telepath. He could not be counted on to *hier*. Most of the time other people could not transmit into his mind at all; they could not even read it. All they got was a fiery bubble and a dull fuzz of meaningless sub-sememes, fractions of thought which added up to less than nothing. And on *spieking*, he was worse. He could not talk with his mind at all.

Now and then he transmitted, and when he did the neighbors ran for cover. If it was anger, a bloody screaming roar almost blotted out their consciousnesses with a rage as solid and red as meat hanging in a slaughterhouse. If he was happy, it was worse. His happiness, which he transmitted without knowing it, had the distractiveness of a speed-saw cutting into diamond-grained rock. His happiness drilled into people with an initial sense of pleasure, followed rapidly by acute discomfort and the sudden wish that all their own teeth would fall out, for the teeth had turned into spinning whorls of raw, unqualified discomfort.

They did not know his biggest personal secret. They suspected that he could *hier* now and then without being able to control it. They did not know that when he did hier, he could hier everything for miles around with microscopic detail and telescopic range. His telepathic intake, when it did work, went right through other people's mind-shields as though they did not exist. (If some of the women in the farms around the Station of Doom knew what he had acci-

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dentally peeped out of their minds, they would have blushed the rest of their lives.) As a result, Rod McBan had a frightful amount of unsorted knowledge which did not quite fit together.

Previous committees had neither awarded him the Station of Doom nor sent him off to the giggle death. They had appreciated his intelligence, his quick wit, his enormous physical strength. But they remained worried about his telepathic handicap. Three times before he had been judged. Three times.

And three times judgment had been suspended.

They had chosen the lesser cruelty and had sent him not to death, but to a new babyhood and a fresh upbringing, hoping that the telepathic capacity of his mind would naturally soar up to the Norstrilian normal.

They had underestimated him.

He knew it.

Thanks to the eavesdropping which he could not control, he understood bits and pieces of what was happening even though nobody had ever told him the rational whys and hows of the process.

It was a gloomy but composed big boy who gave the dust of his own front yard one last useless kick, who turned back into the cabin, walking right through to the main room to the rear door and the back yard, and who greeted his kinswomen politely enough as they, hiding their aching hearts, prepared to dress him up for his trial. They did not want the child to be upset, even though he was as big as a man and showed more composure than did most adult men. They wanted to hide the fearful truth from him. How could they help it?

He already knew; but he pretended he didn't. Cordially enough, just scared enough but not too much, he said:

"What ho, auntie! Hello, cousin. Morning, Maribel. Here's your sheep. Curry him up and trim him for the livestock competition. Do I get a ring in my nose or a bow ribbon around my neck?"

One or two of the young ones laughed, but his oldest "aunt" — actually a fourth cousin, married into another family — pointed seriously and calmly at a chair in the yard and said, "Do sit down, Roderick. This is a serious occasion and we usually do not talk while preparations are going on."

She bit her lower lip and then she added, not as though she wanted to frighten him but because she wanted to impress him:

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"The Vice-chairman will be here today."

("The Vice-chairman" was the head of the government; there had been no Chairman of the Temporary Commonwealth Government for some thousands of years. Norstilians did not like posh and they thought that "vice-chairman" was high enough for any one man to go. Besides, it kept the offworlders guessing.)

Rod was not impressed. He had seen the man. It was in one of his rare moments of broad hiering and he found that the mind of the vice-chairman was full of numbers and horses, the results of every horse-race for three hundred and twenty years, and the projection forward of six probable horse races in the next two years.

"Yes, auntie," he said.

"Don't bray all the time today. You don't have to use your voice for little things like saying *yes*. Just nod your head. It will make a much better impression."

He started to answer, but gulped and nodded instead.

She sank the comb into his thick yellow hair.

Another one of the women, almost a girl, brought up a small table and a basin. He could tell from her expression that she was spieking to him, but this was one of the times in which he could not hier at all.

The aunt gave his hair a particularly fierce tug just as the girl took his hand. He did not know what she meant to do. He yanked his hand back.

The basin fell off the small table. Only then did he realize that it was merely soapy water for a manicure.

"I am sorry," he said; even to him, his voice sounded like a bray. For a moment he felt the fierce rush of humiliation and self-hate.

They should kill me, he thought. *By the time the sun goes down I'll be in the Giggle Room, laughing and laughing before the medicine makes my brains boil away.*

He had reproached himself.

The two women had said nothing. The aunt had walked away to get some shampoo, and the girl was returning with a pitcher, to re-fill the basin.

He looked directly into her eyes, and she into his.

"I want you," she said, very clearly, very quietly, and with a smile which seemed inexplicable to him.

"What for?" said he, equally quietly.

"Just you," she said. "I want you for myself. You're going to live."

"You're Lavinia, my cousin,"

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said he, as though discovering it for the first time.

"Sh-h-h," said the girl. "She's coming back."

When the girl had settled down to getting his fingernails really clean, and the aunt had rubbed something like sheep-dip into his hair, Rod began to feel happy.

His mood changed from the indifference which he had been pretending to himself. It became a real indifference to his fate, an easy acceptance of the gray sky above him, the dull rolling earth below. He had a fear — a little tiny fear, so small that it might have seemed to be a midget pet in a miniature cage — running around the inside of his thinking. It was not the fear that he would die. Somehow he suddenly accepted his chances and remembered how many other people had had to take the same play with fortune. This little fear was something else, the dread that he might not behave himself properly if they did tell him to die.

But then, he thought, I don't have to worry. A negative decision is never a word — just a hypodermic, so that the first bad news the victim has is his own excited, happy laugh.

With this funny peace of mind, his hiering suddenly lifted.

He could not see the Garden of Death, but he could look into the minds tending it; it was a huge van hidden just beyond the next roll of hills, where they used to keep Old Billy, the 1,800-ton sheep. He could hear the clatter of voices in the little town eighteen kilometers away. And he could look right into Lavinia's mind.

It was a picture of himself. But what a picture! So grown, so handsome, so brave-looking. He had schooled himself not to move when he could hier, so that other people would not realize that his rare telepathic gift had come back to him.

Auntie was spieking to Lavinia without noisy words, "We'll see this 'pretty boy in his coffin tonight."

Lavinia thought right back, without apology, "No, we won't."

Rod sat impassive in his chair. The two women, their faces grave and silent, went on spieking the argument at each other with their minds.

"How would you know?" spieked auntie.

"He has the oldest station in all of Old North Australia. He has one of the very oldest names. He is—" and even in spieking her thoughts cluttered up, like a stammer — "he is very nice. He's going to be a wonderful man."

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"Mark my thought," spieked the auntie again, "I'm telling you that we'll see him in his coffin tonight and that by midnight he'll be in his coffin-ride to the Long Way Out."

Lavinia jumped to her feet. She almost knocked over the basin of water a second time. She moved her throat and mouth to speak words but she just croaked:

"Sorry, Rod. Sorry."

Rod McBan, his face guarded, gave a pleasant, stupid little nod, as though he had no idea of what they had been spieking.

She turned and ran, shout-spieking the loud thought at auntie, "Get somebody else to do his hands! You're heartless, hopeless. Get somebody else to do your corpse-washing for you. Not me. Not me!"

"What's the matter with her?" said Rod to the auntie, just as though he did not know.

"She's just difficult, that's all. Nerves, I suppose," she added in her croaking spoken words. She could not talk very well, since all her family and friends could spiek and hier with privacy and grace. "We were spieking with each other about what you would be doing tomorrow."

"Where's a priest, auntie?" said Rod.

"A what?"

"A priest, like the old poem has, in the rough rough days before our people found this planet and got our sheep settled down. Everybody knows it.

Here is the place where the priest went mad.
Over there my mother burned.
I cannot show you the house we had.
We lost that slope when the mountain burned.

There's more to it, but that's the part I remember. Isn't a priest a specialist in how to die? Do we have any around here?"

He watched her mind as she lied to him. As he had spoken he had a perfectly clear picture of one of their more distant neighbors, a man named Tolliver, who had a very gentle manner; but her words were not about Tolliver at all.

"Some things are men's business," she said, cawing her words. "Anyhow, that song isn't about Norstrilia at all. It's about Paradise VII and why we left it. I didn't know you knew it."

In her mind he read, "That boy knows too much."

"Thanks, auntie," said he meekly.

"Come along for the rinse," said she. "We're using an awful lot of real water on you today."

He followed her and he felt more kindly toward her when he saw her think. Lavinia had the right feelings but she drew

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the wrong conclusion. He's going to be dead tonight.

That was too much.

Rod hesitated for a moment, tempering the chords of his oddly-attuned mind. Then he let out a tremendous howl of telepathic joy, just to bother the lot of them.

It did. They all stopped still. Then they stared at him.

In words the auntie said, "What was that?"

"What?" said he, innocently.

"That noise you spieked. It wasn't meaning."

"Just sort of a sneeze, I suppose. I didn't know I did it." Deep down inside himself he chuckled. He might be on his way to the Hoohoo Garden, but he would fritter their friskies for them while he did it.

It was a dashed silly way to die, he thought all to himself.

And then a strange, crazy, happy idea came to him:

Perhaps they can't kill me. Perhaps I have powers — powers of my own!

Well, we'll soon enough find out...

IV

Rod walked across the dusty lot, took three steps up the folding staircase which had been let down from the side of the big trailer van, knocked on the

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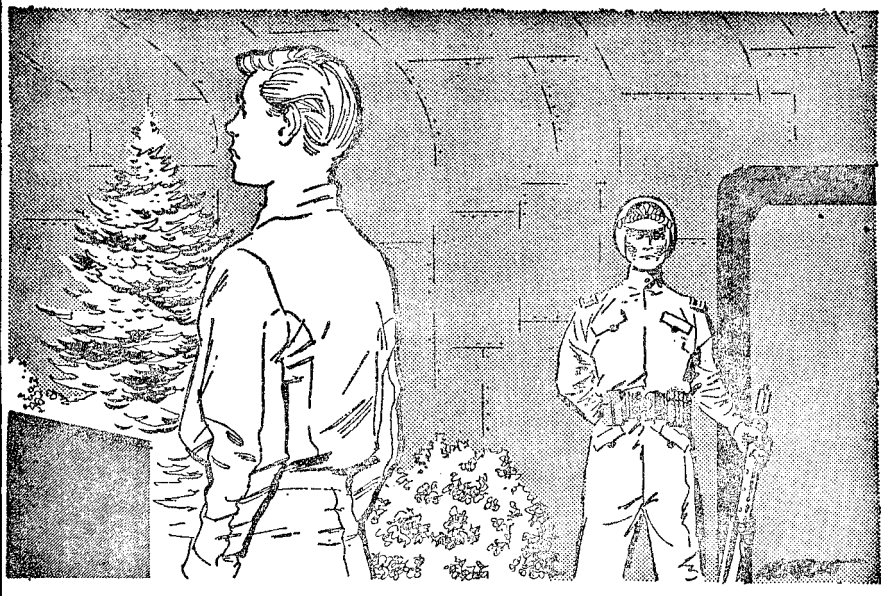

door once as he had been instructed to do, had a green light flash in his face, opened the door and entered.

It was a garden.

The moist, sweet, scent-laden air was like a narcotic. There were bright green plants in profusion. The lights were clear but not bright; their ceiling gave the effect of a penetrating blue sky. He looked around. It was a copy of Old Old Earth. The growths on the green plants were *roses*; he remembered pictures which his computer had showed him. The pictures had not gotten across the idea that they smelled nice at the same time that they looked nice. He wondered if they did that all the time, and then remembered the wet air: wet air always holds smells better than dry air does. At last, almost shyly, he looked up at the three judges.

With real startlement, he saw that one of them was not a Norstrilian at all, but the local commissioner of the Instrumentality, the Lord Redlady — a thin man with a sharp, inquiring face. The other two were Old Taggart and John Beasley. He knew them, but not well.

"Welcome," said the Lord Redlady, speaking in the funny singsong of a man from Manhome.

"Thank you," said Rod.

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"You are Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBan the one hundred and fifty-first?" said Taggart, knowing perfectly well that Rod was that person.

Lord love-a-duck and lucky-me! thought Rod, I've got my hiering, even in this place!

"Yes," said the Lord Redlady.

There was silence.

The other two judges looked at the manhome man; the stranger looked at Rod; Rod stared, and then began to feel sick at the bottom of his stomach.

For the first time in his life, he had met somebody who could penetrate his peculiar perceptual abilities.

At last he thought, "I understand."

The Lord Redlady looked sharply and impatiently at him, as though waiting for a response to that single word "yes," but Rod had already answered—telepathically.

At last Old Taggart broke the silence. "Aren't you going to talk? I asked you your name."

The Lord Redlady held up his hand in a gesture for patience; it was not a gesture which Rod had ever seen before, but he understood it immediately.

He thought telepathically at Rod, "You are watching my thoughts."

"Indeed I am," thought Rod, back at him.

The Lord Redlady clapped a hand to his forehead. "You are hurting me. Did you think you said something?"

With his voice Rod said, "I told you that I was reading your mind."

The Lord Redlady turned to the other two men and spieked to then: "Did either of you *hier* what he tried to *spiek?*"

"No." "No." They both thought back at him. "Just noise, loud noise."

"He is a broadbander like myself. And I have been disgraced for it. You know that I am the only Lord of the Instrumentality who has been degraded from the status of Lord to that of Commissioner—"

"Yes," they spieked.

"You know that they could not cure me of shouting and suggested I die?"

"No," they answered.

"You know that the Instrumentality thought I could not bother you here and sent me to your planet on this miserable, job, just to get me out of the way?"

'Yes," they answered.

"Then, what do you want to do about him? Don't try to fool him. He knows all about this place already." The Lord Red-

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lady glanced quickly, sympathetically up at Rod, giving him a little phantom smile of encouragement. "Do you want to kill him? To exile him? To turn him loose?"

The other two men fussed around in their minds. Rod could see that they were troubled at the idea he could watch them thinking, when they had thought him a telepathic deaf-mute; they also resisted the Lord Redlady's unmannerly precipitation of the decision. Rod almost felt that he was swimming in the thick wet air, with the smell of roses cloying his nostrils so much that he would never smell anything but roses again, when he became aware of a massive consciousness very near him — a fifth person in the room, whom he had not noticed at all before.

It was an earth soldier, complete with uniform. The soldier was handsome, erect, tall, formal with a rigid military decorum. He was, furthermore, not human and he had a strange weapon in his left hand.

"What is that?" spieked Rod to the Earthman. The man saw his face, not the thought.

"An underman. A snakeman. The only one on this planet. He will carry you out of here if the decision goes against you."

Beasley cut in, almost angrily. "Here, cut it out. This is a hearing, not a blossoming tea-party. Don't clutter all that futt into the air. Keep it formal."

"You want a formal hearing?" said the Lord Redlady. "A formal hearing for a man who knows everything that all of us are thinking? It's foolish."

"In Old North Australia, we always have formal hearings," said Old Taggart. With an acuteness of insight born of his own personal danger, Rod saw Taggart all over again for the first time — a careworn poor old man, who had worked a poor farm hard for a thousand years; a farmer, like his ancestors before him; a man rich only in the millions of megacredits which he would never take time to spend; a man of the soil, honorable, careful, formal, righteous and very just. Such men did not yield to innovation, ever.

"Have the hearing then," said the Lord Redlady, "have the hearing if it is your custom, my mister and owner Taggart, my mister and owner Beasley."

The Norstrilians, appeased, bowed their heads briefly.

Almost shyly, Beasley looked over at the Lord Redlady. "Sir and Commissioner, will you say the words — the good old words that will help us to find our duty and to do it."

(Rod saw a quick flare of red

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anger go through the Lord Redlady's mind as the Earth commissioner thought fiercely to himself, "Why all this fuss about killing one poor boy? Let him go, you dull clutts, or kill him." But the Earthman had not directed the thoughts outward and the two Norstrilians were unaware of his private view of them.)

On the outside, the Lord Redlady remained calm. He used his voice, as Nostrilians did on occasion of great ceremony:

"We are here to hear a man."

"We are here to hear him," they responded.

"We are not to judge or to kill, though this may follow," said he.

"Though this may follow," they responded.

"And where, on Old Old Earth, does man come from?"

They knew the answer by rote and said it heavily together: "This is the way it was on Old Old Earth, and this the way it shall be among the stars, no matter how far we men may wander:

"The seed of wheat is planted in dark, moist earth; the seed of man in dark, moist flesh. The seed of wheat fights upward to air, sun and space; the stalk, leaves, blossom and grain flourish under the open glare of heaven. The seed of man grows in the salty private ocean of the womb, the sea-darkness remembered by the bodies of his race. The harvest of wheat is collected by the hands of men; the harvest of men is collected by the tenderness of eternity."

"And what does this mean?" chanted the Lord Redlady.

"To look with mercy, to decide with mercy, to kill with mercy, but to make the harvest of man strong and true and good, the way that the harvest of wheat stood high and proud on Old Old Earth."

"And who is here?" he asked.

They both recited Rod's full name.

When they had finished, the Lord Redlady turned to Rod and said, "I am about to utter the ceremonial words, but I promise you that you will not be surprised, no matter what happens. Take it easy, therefore; easy, easy." Rod was watching the Earthman's mind and the mind of the two Norstrilians. He could see that Beasley and Taggart were befuddled with the ritual of the words, the wetness and scent of the air and the false blue sky in the top of the van; they did not know what they were going to do. But Rod could also see a sharp, keen triumphant thought forming in the bottom of the Lord Redlady's

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mind, *I'll get this boy off!* He almost smiled, despite the presence of the snake man with the rigid smile and the immovable glaring eyes standing just three paces beside him and a little to his rear, so that Rod could only look at him through the corner of his eye.

"Misters and owners!" said the Lord Redlady.

"Mister chairman!" they answered.

"Shall I inform the man who is being heard?"

"Inform him!" they chanted.

"Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBan the one hundred and fifty-first!"

"Yes, sir," said Rod.

"Heir-in-trust of the Station of Doom!"

"That's me," said Rod.

"Hear me!" said the Lord Redlady.

"Hear him!" said the other two.

"You have not come here, child and citizen Roderick, for us to judge you or to punish you. If these things are to be done, they must be done in another place or time, and they must be done by men other than ourselves. The only concern before this board is the following: should you or should you not be allowed to leave this room safe and free and well, taking into no account your innocence or guilt of matters which might be decided elsewhere, but having regard only for the survival and the safety and the welfare on this given planet? We are not punishing and we are not judging, but we *are* deciding, and what we are deciding is your life. Do you understand? Do you agree?"

Rod nodded mutely, drinking in the wet rose-scented air and stilling his sudden dry thirst with the dampness of the atmosphere. If things went wrong now, they did not have very far to go. Not with the motionless snake-man standing just beyond his reach. He tried to look at the snake-brain but got nothing out of it — except for an unexpected glitter of recognition and defiance.

The Lord Redlady went on, Taggart and Beasley hanging on his words as though they had never heard them before.

"Child and citizen, you know the rules. We are not to find you wrong or right. No crime is judged here, no offense. Neither is innocence. We are only judging the single question. Should you live or should you not? Do you understand? Do you agree?"

Said Rod, "Yes, sir."

"And how stand you?"

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"What do you mean?"

"This board is asking you your opinion. Should you live or should you not?"

"I'd like to," said Rod, "but I'm tired of all these childhoods."

"That is not what the board is asking you, child and citizen," said the Lord Redlady. "We are asking you, what do you think? Should you live or should you not live?"

"You want me to judge myself?"

"That's it, boy," said Beasley, "you know the rules. Tell them, boy. I said we could count on you."

The sharp, friendly, neighborly face unexpectedly took on great importance for Rod. He looked at Beasley as though he had never seen the man before. This man was trying to judge him, Rod; and he, Rod, had to help decide on what was to be done with himself. The medicine from the snake-man and the giggle-giggle death, or a walk out into freedom. Rod started to speak and checked himself; he was to speak for Old North Australia. Old North Australia was a tough world, proud of its tough men. No wonder the board gave him a tough decision. Rod made up his mind and he spoke clearly and deliberately:

"I'd say no. Do not let me live. I don't fit. I can't spiek and hier. Nobody knows what my children would be like, but the odds are against them. Except for one thing. . ."

"And what, child and citizen, is that?" asked the Lord Redlady, while Beasley and Taggart watched as though they were staring at the last five meters of a horse race.

"Look at me carefully, citizens and members of the board," said Rod, finding that in this milieu it was easy to fall into a ceremonious way of talking. "Look at me carefully and do not consider my own happiness, because you are not allowed, by law, to judge that anyhow. Look at my talent — the way I can hier, the big thunderstorm way I can spiek." Rod gathered his mind for a final gamble and as his lips got through talking, he spat his whole mind at them:

— anger-anger, rage-red!

— blood-red!

— fire-fury!

— noise, stench, glare, roughness, sourness and hate hate hate!

— all the anxiety of a bitter day!

— crutts, whelps, pups!

It all poured out at once. The Lord Redlady turned pale and compressed his lips, Old Taggart put his hands over his face, Beasley looked bewildered and

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nauseated. Beasley then started to belch as calm descended on the room.

In a slightly shaky voice, the Lord Redlady asked, "And what was that supposed to show, child and citizen?"

"In grown-up form, sir, could it be a useful weapon?"

The Lord Redlady looked at the other two. They talked with the tiny expressions on their faces; if they were spieking, Rod could not read it. This last effort had cost him all telepathic input.

"Let's go on," said Taggart.

"Are you ready?" said the Lord Redlady to Rod.

"Yes, sir," said Rod.

"I continue," said the Lord Redlady. "If you understand your own case as we see it, we shall proceed to make a decision and, upon making the decision, to kill you immediately or to set you free no less immediately. And we appreciate the courtesy which you will have shown this board, for without courtesy there could be no proper hearing, without the hearing no appropriate decision, and without an appropriate decision there could be neither justice nor safety in the years to come. Do you understand? Do you agree?"

"I suppose so," said Rod.

"Do you really understand? It is your life which we are talking about," said the Lord Redlady.

"I understand and I agree," said Rod.

"Cover us," said the Lord Redlady.

Rod started to ask *how* when he understood that the command was not directed at him in the least.

The snake-man had come to life and was breathing heavily. He spoke in clear old words, with an odd dropping cadence in each syllable.

"High, my lord, or utter maximum?"

For answer, the Lord Redlady pointed his right arm straight up with the index finger straight at the ceiling. The snake-man hissed and gathered his emotions for an attack.

Rod felt his skin go goose-pimply all over, then he felt the hair on the back of his neck rise, finally he felt nothing but an unbearable alertness. If these were the thoughts which the snake-man was sending out of the trailer van, no passer-by could possibly eavesdrop on the decision. The startling pressure of raw menace would take care of that instead.

The three members of the board held hands and seemed to be asleep.

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The Lord Redlady opened his eyes and shook his head, almost imperceptibly, at the snake-soldier.

The feeling of snake-threat went off. The soldier returned to his immobile position, eyes forward. The members of the board slumped over their table. They did not seem to be able or ready to speak. They looked out of breath. At last Taggart dragged himself to his feet, gasping his message to Rod:

"There's the door, boy. Go. You're a citizen. Free."

Rod started to thank him but the old man held up his right hand:

"Don't thank me. Duty. But remember—not one word, ever, about this hearing. Go along."

Rod plunged for the door, lurched through, and was in his own yard. Free.

For a moment he stood in the yard, stunned.

The dear gray sky of Old North Australia rolled low overhead; this was no longer the eerie light of Old Earth, where the heavens were supposed to shine perpetually blue. He sneezed as the dry air caught the tissue of his nostrils. He felt his clothing chill as the moisture evaporated out of it; he did not think whether it was the wetness of the trailer-van or his own sweat which had made his shirt so wet. There were a lot of people there, and a lot of light. And the smell of roses was as far away as another life might be.

Lavinia stood near him, weeping.

He started to turn to her, when a collective gasp from the crowd caused him to turn around.

The snake-man had come out of the van. (It was just an old theater-van, he realized at last, the kind which he himself had entered a hundred times.) His earth uniform looked like the acme of wealth and decadence among the dusty coveralls of the men and the poplin dresses of the women. His green complexion looked bright among the tanned faces of the Norstrilians. He saluted Rod.

Rod did not return the salute. He just stared.

Perhaps they had changed their minds and had sent the giggle death after him.

The snake-soldier watched with flickering eyes. He made no comment, but he saluted and went stiffy back to the van. At the door he turned and looked over the crowd as though he were appraising the easiest way to kill them all. He said nothing, threatened nothing. He opened the door and put himself into the van. There was no

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sign of who the human inhabitants of the van might be. There must be, thought Rod, some way of getting them in and out of the Garden of Death very secretly and very quietly, because he had lived around the neighborhood a long time and had never had the faintest idea that his own neighbors might sit on a board.

The people were funny. They stood quietly in the yard, waiting for him to make the first move.

He turned stiffly and looked around more deliberately.

Why, it was his neighbors and kinfolk, all of them — McBans, MacArthurs, Passarellis, Schmidts, even the Sanders!

He lifted his hand in greeting to all of them.

Pandemonium broke loose.

They rushed toward him. The women kissed him, the men patted him on the back and shook his hand, the little children began a piping little song about the Station of Doom. He had become the center of a mob which led him to his own kitchen.

Many of the people had begun to cry.

He wondered why. Almost immediately, he understood —

They liked him.

For unfathomable *people* reasons, mixed-up non-logical human reasons, they had wished him well. Even the auntie who had predicted a coffin for him was snivelling without shame, using a corner of her apron to wipe her eyes and nose.

He had gotten tired of people, being a freak himself, but in this moment of trial their capricious goodness flowed over him like a great wave. He let them sit him down in his own kitchen. Among the babies, the weeps, the laughter, the hearty and falsely cheerful relief, he heard a single fugue being repeated again and again: they liked him. He had come back from death.

Without liquor, it made him drunk. "I can't stand it," he shouted, "I like you all so dashed bloomed crutting much that I could beat the sentimental brains out of the whole crook lot of you. . ."

"Isn't that a sweet speech?" murmured an old farm wife nearby.

A policeman in full uniform agreed.

The party had started. It lasted three full days, and when it was over there was not a dry eye or a full bottle on the whole Station of Doom.

From time to time he cleared up enough to enjoy his miraculous gift of hiering. He looked

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through all their minds while they chatted and sang and drank and ate and were as happy as Larry; there was not one of them who had come along vainly. They were truly rejoicing. They loved him. They wished him well. He had his doubts about how long that kind of love would last, but he enjoyed it while it lasted.

Lavinia stayed out of his way the first day; on the second and third days she was gone. They gave him real Norstrilian beer to drink, which they had brought up to 108 proof by the simple addition of raw spirits. With this, he forgot the Garden of Death, the sweet wet smells, the precise offworld voice of the Lord Redlady.

He looked in their minds and over and over again he saw the same thing.

"You're our boy. You made it. You're alive. Good luck, Rod, good luck to you, fellow. We didn't have to see you stagger off, giggling and happy, to the house that you would die in."

Had he made it, thought Rod, or was it chance which had done it for him?

V

By the end of the week, the celebration was over. The assorted aunts and cousins had gone back to their farms. The Station of Doom was quiet, and Rod spent the morning making sure that the fieldhands had not neglected the sheep too much during the prolonged party. He found that Daisy, a young 300-ton sheep, had not been turned for two days and had to be relanolinized on her ground side before earth canker set in; he discovered that the nutrient tubes for Tanner, his 1000-ton ram, had become jammed and that the poor sheep was getting a bad case of edema in his gigantic legs. Otherwise things were quiet. Even when he saw Beasley's red pony tethered in his own yard, he had no premonition of trouble.

He went cheerfully into the house, greeting Beasley with an irreverent:

"Have a drink on me, Mister and Owner Beasley! Oh, you have one already! Have the next one then, sir!"

"Thanks for the drink, lad, but I came to see you. On business."

"Yes sir," said Rod. "You're one of my appointed trustees, aren't you?"

"That I am," said Beasley, "but you're in trouble, lad. Real trouble."

Rod smiled at him evenly and calmly. He knew that the older man had to make a big effort

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to talk with his voice instead of just spieking with his mind; he appreciated the fact that Beasley had come to him personally, instead of talking to the other trustees about him. It was a sign that he, Rod, had passed his ordeal.

With genuine composure, Rod declared, "I've been thinking, sir, this week, that I'd gotten out of trouble."

"What do you mean, Owner McBan?"

"You remember..." Rod did not dare mention the Garden of Death, nor his memory that Beasley had been one of the secret board who had passed him as being fit to live.

Beasley took the cue. "Some things we don't mention, lad, and I see that you have been well taught."

He stopped there and stared at Rod with the expression of a man looking at an unfamiliar corpse before turning it over to identify it. Rod became uneasy with the stare.

"Sit, lad, sit down," said Beasley, commanding Rod in his own house.

Rod sat down on the bench, since Beasley occupied the only chair — Rod's grandfather's huge, carved, offworld throne. He sat. He did not like being ordered about, but he was sure that Beasley meant him well and was probably strained by the unfamiliar effort of talking with his throat and mouth.

Beasley looked at him again with that peculiar expression, a mixture of sympathy and distaste.

"Get up again, lad, and look round your house to see if there's anybody about."

"There isn't," said Rod. "My aunt Doris left after I was cleared, the workwoman Eleanor borrowed a cart and went off to market and I have only two station hands. They're both out reinfecting Baby. She ran low on her santaclara count."

Normally, the wealth-producing sicknesses of their gigantic half-paralyzed sheep would have engrossed the full attention of any two Norstrilian farmers, without respect to differences in age and grade. This time, no. Beasley had something serious and unpleasant on his mind. He looked so pruney and unquiet that Rod felt a real sympathy for the man.

Rod did not argue. Dutifully he went out the back door, looked around the south side of the house, saw no one, walked around the house on the north side, saw no one there either, and re-entered the house from the front door. Beasley had not stirred, except to pour a little

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more bitter ale from his bottle to his glass. Rod met his eyes. Without another word, Rod sat down. If the man was seriously concerned about him (which Rod thought Beasley was), and if the man was reasonably intelligent (which Rod knew he was), the communication was worth waiting for and listening too. Rod was still sustained by the pleasant feeling that his neighbors really liked him, a feeling which had come plainly to the surface of their honest Norstrilian faces when he walked back into his own back yard from the van of the Garden of Death.

Beasley said, as though he were speaking of an unfamiliar food or a rare drink, "Boy, this talking has some advantages. If a man doesn't put his ear into it, he can't just pick it up with his mind, can he, now?"

Rod thought for a moment. Candidly he spoke, "I'm too young to know for sure, but I never heard of somebody picking up spoken words by hiering them with his mind. It seems to be one or the other. You never talk while you are spieking, do you?"

Beasley nodded. "That's it, then. I have something to tell you which I shouldn't tell you, and yet I have got to tell you. So if I keep my voice blooming low, nobody else will pick it up, will they?"

Rod nodded. "What is it, sir? Is there something wrong with the title to my property?"

Beasley took a drink but kept staring at Rod over the top of the mug while he drank. "You've got trouble there too, lad. But even though it's bad, it's something I can talk over with you and with the other trustee. This is more personal, in a way. And worse."

"Please, sir! What is it?" cried Rod, almost exasperated by all this mystification.

"The Onseck is after you."

"What's an onseck?" said Rod, "I have never heard of it."

"It's not an it," said Beasley gloomily, "it's a him. Onseck, you know, the chap in the Commonwealth government. The man who keeps the books for the vice-chairman. It was Hon-Sec., meaning Honorary Secretary or something else prehistoric, when we first came to this planet, but by now everybody just says Onseck and writes it just the way it sounds. He knows that he can't reverse your hearing in the Garden of Death."

"Nobody could!" cried Rod. "It's never been done; everybody knows that."

"They may know it, but there's civil trial."

"How can they give me a civil

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trial when I haven't had time to change? You yourself must know —?"

"Never, laddie, never say what Beasley knows or doesn't know. Just say what you think." Even in private, between just the two of them, Beasley did not want to violate the fundamental secrecy of the hearing in the Garden of Death.

"I'm just going to say, Mister and Owner Beasley," said Rod very heatedly, "that a civil trial for general incompetence is something which is applied to an owner only after the neighbors have been complaining for a long time about him. They haven't had the time or the right to complain about me, have they now?"

Beasley kept his hand on the handle of his mug. The use of spoken words tired him. A crown of sweat began to show around the top of his forehead.

"Suppose, lad," said he very solemnly, "that I knew through proper channels something about how you were judged in that van — there! I've said it, me that shouldn't have. And suppose that I knew the Onseck hated a foreign gentleman that might have been in a van like that — "

"The Lord Redlady?" whispered Rod, shocked at last by the fact that Beasley forced himself to talk about the unmentionable.

"Aye," nodded Beasley, his honest face close to breaking into tears, "and suppose that I knew that the Onseck knew you and felt the rule was wrong, all wrong, that you were a freak who would hurt all Norstrilia, what would I do?"

"I don't know," said Rod. "Tell me, perhaps?"

"Never," said Beasley. "I'm an honest man. Get me another drink."

Rod walked over to the cupboard, brought out another bottle of bitter ale, wondering where or when he might have known the Onseck. He had never had much of anything to do with government. His family — first his grandfather, while he lived, and then his aunts and cousins — had taken care of all the official papers and permits and things.

Beasley drank deeply. "Good ale, this. Hard work, talking, even though it's a fine way to keep a secret, if you're pretty sure nobody can peep our minds."

"I don't know him," said Rod.

"Who?" asked Beasley, momentarily off his trail of thought.

"The Onseck. I don't know any Onseck. I've never been to New Canberra. I've never seen

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an official — no, nor an off-worlder neither, not until I met that foreign gentleman we were talking about. How can the Onseck know me if I don't know him?"

"But you did, laddie. He wasn't Onseck then."

"For sheep's sake, sir," said Rod, "tell me who it is!"

"Never use violent language when simple thoughts are clearer," said Beasley glumly.

"I'm sorry, sir. I apologize. Who was it?"

"Houghton Syme to the hundred-and-forty-ninth," then said Beasley.

"We have no neighbor of that name, sir."

"No, we don't," said Beasley hoarsely, as though he had come to the end of his road in imparting secrets.

Rod stared at him, still puzzled.

In the far, far distance way beyond Pillow Hill, his giant sheep baa'd. That probably meant that Hopper was hoisting her into a new position on her platform so that she could reach fresh grass.

Beasley brought his face close to Rod's. He whispered, and it was funny to see the hash a normal man made out of whispering when he hadn't even talked with his voice for half a year.

His words had a low, dirty tone to them, as though he were going to tell Rod an extremely filthy story or ask him some personal and most improper question.

"Your life, laddie," he gasped. "I know you've had a rum one. I hate to ask you, but I must. How much do you know of your own life?"

"Oh, that," said Rod easily. "*That*. I don't mind being asked that, even if it is a little wrong-o. I have had four childhoods, zero to sixteen each time. My family kept hoping that I would grow up to spiek and hier like everybody else, but I just stayed me. Of course, I wasn't a real baby on the three times they started me over, just sort of an educated idiot the size of a boy sixteen."

"That's it, *lad. But can you remember them, those other lives?*"

"Bits and pieces, sir. Pieces and bits. It didn't hold together—" He checked himself and gasped, "Houghton Syme! Houghton Syme! Old Hot and Simple. Of course I know him. The one-shot boy. I knew him in my first prepper, in my first childhood. We were pretty good friends, but we hated each other anyhow. I was a freak and he was too. I couldn't spiek and hier, and he couldn't take stroon. That meant that I would

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never get through the Garden of Death — just the giggle room and a fine owner's coffin for me. And him — he was worse. He would just get an Old Earth lifetime — a hundred and sixty years or so and then blotto. He must be an oldish man now. Poor chap! How did he get to be Onseck? What power does an Onseck have?"

"Now you have it, laddie. He says he's your friend and that he hates to do it, but he's got to see to it that you are killed — for the good of Norstrilia. He says it's his duty. He got to be Onseck because he was always jawing about his duty and people were a little sorry for him because he was going to die so soon, just one Old Earth lifetime with all the stroon in the universe produced around his feet and him unable to take it —"

"They never cured him, then?"

"Never," said Beasley. "He's an old man now, and bitter. And he's sworn to see you die."

"Can he do it? Being Onseck, I mean."

"He might. He hates that foreign gentleman we were talking about because the offworlder told him he was a provincial fool. He hates you because you will live and he will not. What was it you called him in school?"

"Old Hot and Simple."

"He's not hot and he's not simple. He's cold and complicated and cruel and unhappy. If we didn't all of us think that he was going to die in a little while, ten or a hundred years or so, we might vote him into a giggle room ourselves. For misery and incompetence. But he is Onseck and he's after you. I've said it now. I shouldn't have. But when I saw that sly cold face talking about you and trying to declare your board incompetent right while you, laddie, were having an honest binge with your family and neighbors at having gotten through at last — when I saw that white sly face creeping around where you couldn't even see him for a fair fight — than I said to myself, Rod McBan may not be a man officially, but the poor clodding crutt has paid the full price for being a man. So I've told you. I have taken a chance, and I may have hurt my honor." Beasley sighed. His honest red face was troubled indeed. "I may have have hurt my honor, a sore thing here in Norstrilia where a man can live as long as he wants. But I'm glad I did. Besides, my throat is sore with all this talking. Give me another bottle of bitter ale, lad, before I go and get my horse."

Wordlessly Rod got him the ale and poured it for him.

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Beasley, uninclined to do any more talking, sipped at the ale. Perhaps, thought Rod, he is hiering around carefully to see if there have been any human minds nearby which might have picked up the telepathic leakage from the conversation.

As Beasley handed back the mug and started to leave with a wordless neighborly nod, Rod could not restrain himself from asking one last question, which he spoke in a hissed whisper. Beasley had gotten his mind so far off the subject of soundtalk that he merely stared at Rod. Perhaps, Rod thought, he is asking me to spiek plainly because he has forgotten that I cannot spiek at all. That was the case, because Beasley croaked in a very hoarse voice:

"What is it, lad? Don't make me talk much. My voice is scratching me and my honor is sore within me."

"What should I do, sir? What should I do?"

"Mister and Owner McBan, that's your problem. I'm not you. I wouldn't know."

"But what would you do, sir? Suppose you were me."

Beasley's blue eye's looked over at Pillow Hill for a moment, abstractedly. "Get off-planet. Get off. Go away. For a hundred years or so. Then that man — *him* —he'll be dead in due time and you can come back, fresh as a new-blossomed twinkle."

"But how, sir? How can I do it?"

Beasley patted him on his shoulder, gave him a broad wordless smile, put his foot in his stirrup, sprang into his saddle and looked down at Rod.

"I wouldn't know, neighbor. But good luck to you, just the same. I've done more than I should. Good-by."

He slapped his horse gently with his open hand and trotted out of the yard. At the edge of the yard the horse changed to a canter.

Rod stood in his own doorway, utterly alone.

VI

After Beasley left, Rod loped miserably around his farm.

He missed his grandfather, who had been living during his first three childhoods, but who had died while Rod was going through a fourth, simulated infancy in an attempt to cure his telepathic handicap. He even missed his Aunt Margot, who had voluntarily gone into Withdrawal at the age of 902. There were plenty of cousins and kinsmen from whom he could ask advice; there were the legal trustees of the Station of Doom;

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there were the two hands on the farm; there was even the chance that he could go see Mother Hitton herself, because she had once been married to one of his great[11] - uncles. But this time he did not want companionship. There was nothing he could do with people. The Onseck was people too; imagine old "hot and simple" becoming a power in the land. Rod knew that this was his own fight.

His own.

What had ever been his own before?

Not even his life. He could remember bits about the different boyhoods he had. He even had vague uncomfortable glimpses of seasons of pain — the times they had sent him back to babyhood while leaving him large. That hadn't been his choice. The old man had ordered it or the Vice-chairman had approved it or Aunt Margot had begged for it. Nobody had asked him much, except to say, "You will agree..."

He had agreed.

He had been good — so good that he hated them all at times and wondered if they knew he hated them. The hate never lasted, because the real people involved were too well-meaning, too kind, too ambitious for his own sake. He had to love them back.

Trying to think these things over, he loped around his estate on foot.

The big sheep lay on their platform, forever sick, forever gigantic. Perhaps some of them remembered where they had been lambs, free to run through the sparse grass, free to push their heads through the pliofilm covers of the canals and to help themselves to water when they wanted to drink. Now they weighed hundreds of tons and were fed by feeding machines, watched by guard machines, checked by automatic doctors. They were fed and watered a little through the mouth only because pastoral experience showed that they stayed fatter and lived longer if a semblance of normality were left to them.

His aunt Doris, who kept house for him, was still away.

His workwoman Eleanor, whom he paid an annual sum larger than many planets paid for their entire armed forces, had gone to market.

The two sheephands, Bill and Hopper, were still out.

And he did not want to talk to them, anyhow.

He wished that he could see the Lord Redlady, that strange offworld man whom he had met in the Garden of Death. The Lord Redlady just looked as though he knew more things

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than Norstrilians did, as though he came from sharper, crueller, wiser societies than most people in Old North Australia had ever seen.

But you can't ask for a Lord. Particularly not when you have met him only in a secret hearing.

Rod had gotten to the final limits of his own land.

Humphrey's Lawsuit lay beyond — a broad strip of poor land, completely untended, the building-high ribs of long-dead sheep skeletons making weird shadows as the sun began to set. The Humphrey family had been lawing over that land for hundreds of years. Meanwhile it lay waste except for the few authorized public animals which the Commonwealth was allowed to put on any land, public or private.

Rod knew that freedom was only two steps away.

All he had to do was to step over the line and shout with his mind for people. He could do that even though he could not really spiek. A telepathic garble of alarm would bring the orbiting guards down to him in seven or eight minutes. Then he would need only to say:

"I swear off title. I give up mistership and ownership. I demand my living from the Commonwealth. Watch me, people, while I repeat."

Three repetitions of this would make him an Official Pauper, with not a care left — no meetings, no land to tend, no accounting to do, nothing but to wander around Old North Australia picking up any job he wanted and quitting it whenever he wanted. It was a good life, a free life, the best the Commonwealth could offer to squatters and owners who otherwise lived long centuries of care, responsibility and honor. It was a fine life—

But no McBan had ever taken it. Not even a cousin.

Nor could he.

He went back to the house, miserable. He listened to Eleanor talking with Bill and Hopper while dinner was served — a huge plate of boiled mutton, potatoes, hard-boiled eggs, station-brewed beer out of the keg. (There were planets, he knew, where people never tasted such food from birth to death. There they lived on impregnated pasteboard which was salvaged from the latrines, reimpregnated with nutrients and vitamins, deodorized and sterilized and issued again the next day.) He knew it was a fine dinner, but he did not care.

How could he talk about the Onseck to these people?

He dropped the rest of the dinner into his stomach as

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though it were sheep-food pellets, and went to his bedroom early.

For the first time in his life, he slept badly.

And out of the badsleep, the answer came.

"Ask Hamlet."

Hamlet was not even a man. He was just a talking picture in a cave, but he was wise, he was from Old Earth Itself, and he had no friends to whom to give Rod's secrets.

With this idea, Rod turned on his sleeping shelf and went into a deep sleep.

In the morning his Aunt Doris was still not back, so he told the workwoman Eleanor:

"I'll be gone all day. Don't look for me or worry about me."

"What about your lunch, mister and owner? You can't run around the station with no tucker."

"Wrap some up, then."

"Where're you going, mister and owner, sir, if you can tell me?" There was an unpleasant searching edge in her voice, as though — being the only adult woman present — she had to check on him as though he were still a child. He didn't like it, but he replied with a frank enough air.

"I'm not leaving the station. I just need to think."

More kindly she said, "You think, then, Rod. Just go right ahead and think. If you ask me, you ought to go live with a family — "

'I know what you've said," he interrupted her. "I'm not making any big decisions today, Eleanor. Just rambling and thinking."

"All right then, mister and owner. Ramble around and worry about the ground you're walking on. It's you that get the worries for it. I'm glad my daddy took the official pauper words. We used to be rich." Unexpectedly she brightened and laughed at herself. "Now that, you've heard that too, Rod. Here's your food. Do you have your water?"

"I'll steal from the sheep," he said irreverently. She knew he was joking and she waved him a friendly good-by.

The old, old gap was to the rear of the house, so he left by the front. He wanted to go the long wrong way around, so that neither human eyes nor human minds would stumble on the secret he had found fifty-six years before, the first time he was eight years old.

Through all the pain and the troubles he had remembered this one vivid bright secret — the deep cave full of treasures. To these he must go.

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VII

The sun was high in the sky, spreading its patch of brighter gray above the gray clouds, when he slid into what looked like a dry irrigation ditch.

He walked a few steps along the ditch. Then he stopped and listened carefully, very carefully.

There was no sound except for the snoring of a young hundred-ton ram a mile or so away.

Rod then stared around.

In the far distance, a police ornithopter soared as lazy as a sated hawk.

Rod tried desperately much to hier.

He heard nothing with his mind, but with his ears he heard the slow heavy pulsing of his own blood pounding through his head.

He took a chance.

The trapdoor was there, just inside the edge of the culvert.

He lifted it and, leaving it open, dove in as confidently as a swimmer knifing his way into a familiar pool.

He knew his way.

His clothes ripped a little but the weight of his body dragged him past the narrowness of the doorframe.

His hands reached out and like the hands of an acrobat they caught the inner bar. The door behind snapped shut. How frightening this had been when he was little and tried the trip for the first time! He had let himself down with a rope and a torch, never realizing the importance of the trap-door at the edge of the culvert!

Now it was easy.

With a thud, he landed on his feet. The bright old illegal lights went on. The dehumidifier began to purr, lest the wetness of his breath spoil the treasures in the room.

There were drama-cubes by the score, with two different sizes of projectors. There were heaps of clothing, for both men and women, left over from forgotten ages. In a chest, in the corner, there was even a small machine from before the Age of Space, a crude but beautiful little mechanical chronograph, completely without resonance compensation, and the ancient name "Jaeger Le Coultre" written across its face. It still kept earth time after fifteen thousand years.

Rod sat down in an utterly impermissable chair — one which seemed to be a complex of pillows built on an interlocking frame. The touch alone was a medicine for his worries. One chair-leg was broken, but that was the way his grandfather-to-the-nineteenth had violated the Clean Sweep.

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The Clean Sweep had been Old North Australia's last political crisis many centuries before, when the last underpeople were hunted down and driven off the planet and when all damaging luxuries had to be turned in to the Commonwealth authorities, to be re-purchased by their owners only at a re-valuation twenty thousand times higher than their assessed worth. It was the final effort to keep Norstrilians simple, healthy and well. Every citizen had to swear that he had turned in every single item, and the oath had been taken with thousands of telepaths watching. It was a testimony to the high mental power and adept deceitfulness of grandfather-to-the-nineteenth that Rod McBan CXXX had inflicted only symbolic breakage on his favorite treasures, some of which were not even in the categories allowed for re-purchase, like off-world drama-cubes, and had been able to hide his things in an unimportant corner of his fields — hide them so well that neither robbers nor police had thought of them since.

Rod picked up his favorite. *Hamlet,* by William Shakespeare. Without viewer, the cube was designed to act when touched by a true human being. The top of the cube became a little stage, the actors appeared as bright miniatures speaking Ancient Inglish, a language very close to Old North Australian, and the telepathic commentary, cued to the Old Common Tongue, rounded out the story. Since Rod was not dependably telepathic, he had learned a great deal of the Ancient Inglish by trying to understanding the dramas without the commentary. He did not like what he first saw and he shook the cube until the play approached its end. At last he heard the dear high familiar voice speaking in Hamlet's last scene:

I am dead, Horatio. Wretched queen, adieu!
You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time—as this fell sergeant, death,
Is strict in his arrest — O! I could tell you —
But let it be, Horatio, I am dead.

Rod shook the cube very gently and the scene sped down a few lines. Hamlet was still talking:

. . . what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me.
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

Rod put down the cube very gently.

The bright little figures disappeared.

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The room was silent.

But he had the answer and it was wisdom. And wisdom, coeval with man, comes unannounced, unbidden, and unwelcome into every life; Rod found that he had discovered the answer to a basic problem.

But not his own problem. The answer was Houghton Symes, old Hot and Simple.

It was the Hon. Sec. who was already dying of a wounded name. Hence the persecution. It was the Onseck who had the "fell sergeant, death" acting strictly in his arrest, even if the arrest were only a few decades off instead of a few minutes. He, Rod McBan, was to live; his old acquaintance was to die; and the dying — oh, the dying, always, always! — could not help resenting the survivors, even if they were loved ones, at least for a little bit.

Hence the Onseck.

But what of himself?

Rod brushed a pile of priceless, illegal manuscripts out of the way and picked up a small book marked, *Reconstituted Late Inglish Language Verse.* At each page as it opened, a young man or woman seven centimeters high stood up brightly on the page and recited the text. Rod ruffled the pages of the old book so that the little figures appeared and trembled and fled like weak flames seen on a bright day. One caught his eye and he stopped the page at mid-poem. The figure was saying:

> The challenge holds. I cannot now retract
> The boast I made to that relentless court,
> The hostile justice of my self-contempt.
> If now the ordeal is prepared, my act
> Must soon be shown. I pray that it is short,
> And never dream that I shall be exempt.

He glanced at the foot of the page and saw the name, Casimir Colegrove. Of course, he had seen that name before. An old poet. A good one. But what did the words mean to him, Rod McBan, sitting in a hidden hole within the limits of his own land? He was a Mister and Owner, in all except final title, and he was running from an enemy he could not define.

"The hostile justice of my self-contempt . . ."

That *was* the key of it! He had not run from the Onseck. He had run from himself. He took justice itself as hostile because it corresponded with his sixty-odd years of boyhood, his endless disappointment, his compliance with things which would never, till all worlds burned, be complied with. How could he hier and spiek like other people if somewhere a dominant feature had turned recessive?

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Hadn't real justice already vindicated him and cleared him?

It was himself who was cruel. Other people were kind. (Shrewdness made him add, "sometimes.")

He had taken his own inner sense of trouble and had made it fit the outside world, like the morbid little poems he had read a long time ago. It was somewhere right in this room, and when he had first read it, he felt that the long-dead writer had put it down for himself alone. But it wasn't really so. Other people had had their troubles too and the poem had expressed something older than Rod McBan. It went,

The wheels of fate are spinning around.
Between them the souls of men are ground.
Who strive for throats to make some sound
Of protest out of the mad profound
Trap of the godmachine!

"Godmachine," though Rod, "now that's a clue. I've got the only all-mechanical computer on this planet. I'll play it on the stroon crop speculations, win all or lose all."

The boy stood up in the forbidden room.

"Fight it is," he said to the cubes on the floor, "and a good thanks to you, grandfather-to-the-nineteenth. You met the law and did not lose. And now it is my turn to be Rod McBan."

He turned and shouted to himself:

"To earth!"

The call embarrassed him. He felt unseen eyes staring at him. He almost blushed, and would have hated himself if he had.

He stood on the top of a treasure-chest turned on its side. Two more gold coins, worthless as money but priceless as curios, fell noiselessly on the thick old rugs. He thought a good-by again to his secret room and he jumped upward for the bar. He caught it, chinned himself, raised himself higher, swung a leg on it but not over it, got his other foot on the bar and then, very carefully but with the power of all his muscles, pushed himself into the black opening above. The lights suddenly went off, the dehumidifier hummed louder, and the daylight dazzled him as the trapdoor, touched, flung itself open.

He thrust his head into the culvert. The daylight seemed deep gray after the brilliance of the treasure room.

All silent. All clear. He rolled into the ditch.

The door, with silence and power, closed itself behind him. He was never to know it, but it had been cued to the genetic code of the descendants of Rod McBan. Had any other person

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touched it, it would have withstood them for a long time. Almost forever.

You see, it was not really his door. He was its boy.

"This land has made me," said Rod aloud, as he clambered out of the ditch and looked around.

The young ram had apparently wakened; his snoring had stopped and over the quiet hill there came the sound of his panting. Thirsty again! The Station of Doom was not so rich that it could afford unlimited water to its giant sheep. They lived all right. Rod would have asked the trustees to sell even the sheep for water, if a real drought set in. But never the land.

Never the land.

No land for sale.

It didn't even really belong to him: he belonged to it — the rolling dry fields, the covered rivers and canals, the sly catchments which caught every drop which might otherwise have gone to his neighbors. That was the pastoral business — its product immortality and its price water. The Commonwealth could have flooded the planet or created oceans, with the financial resources it had at command, but the planet and the people were regarded as one ecological entity. Old Australia — the fabulous continent of old Earth now covered by the ruins of the abandoned Chinesian cityworld of Nanbien — had in its prime been broad, dry, open, beautiful; the planet of Old North Australia, by the dead weight of its own tradition, had to remain the same.

Imagine trees. Imagine leaves — vegetation dropping uneaten to the ground. Imagine water pouring by the thousands of tons, no one greeting it with tears of relief or happy laughter! Imagine Earth — Old Earth — Manhome itself. Rod had tried to think of a whole planet inhabited by Hamlets, drenched with music and poetry, knee-deep in blood and drama. It was unimaginable, really, though he had tried to think it through.

Like a chill, a drill, a thrill cutting into his very nerves he thought:

Imagine Earth women!

What terrifying beautiful things they must be! Dedicated to ancient and corruptive arts, surrounded by the objects which Norstrilia had forbidden long ago stimulated by experiences which the very law of his own world had expunged from the books! He would meet them; he couldn't help it; what, what would he do when he met a genuine Earth woman?

He would have to ask his com-

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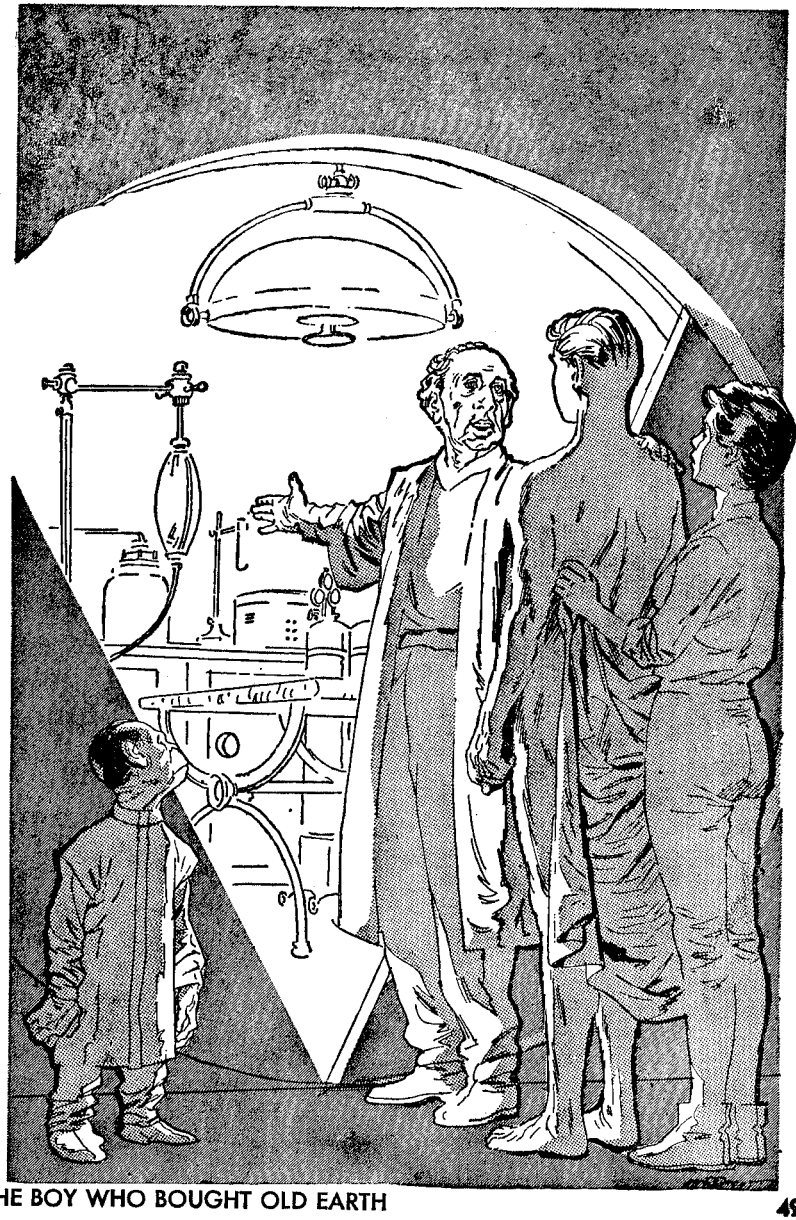

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puter, even though the neighbors laughed at him for having the only pure computer left on the planet.

They didn't know what grandfather to-the-nineteenth had done. He had taught the computer to lie. It stored all the forbidden things which the Law of the Clean Sweep had brushed out of Norstrilian experience. It could lie like a trooper. Rod wondered whether "a trooper" might be some archaic Earth official who did nothing but tell the untruth, day in and day out, for his living. But the computer usually did not lie to him.

If grandfather [19] had behaved as saucily and unconventionally with the computer as he had with everything else, that particular computer would know all about women. Even things which they did not themselves know. Or wish to know.

Good computer! thought Rod as he trotted around the long, long fields to his house. Eleanor would have the tucker on. Doris might be back. Bill and Hopper would be angry if they had to wait for the mister before they ate. To speed up his trip, he headed straight for the little cliff behind the house, hoping no one would see him jump down it. He was much stronger than most of the men he knew, but he was anxious, for some private inexpressible reason, for them not to know it.

He found the cliff.

He dropped over it, feet first, his heels kicking up the scree as he tobogganed through loose rock to the foot of the slope.

And aunt Doris was there.

"Where have you been?" said she.

"Walking, mum," said he.

She gave him a quizzical look but knew better than to ask more. Talking always fussed her, anyhow. She hated the sound of her voice, which she considered much too high. The matter passed.

Inside the house, they ate. Beyond the door and the oil lamp. a gray world became moonless, starless, black. This was night, his own night.

VIII

At the end of the meal he waited for Doris to say grace to the Queen. She did, but under her thick eyebrows her eyes expressed something other than thanks.

"You're going out," she said right after the prayer. It was an accusation, not a question.

The two hired men looked at him with quiet doubt. A week ago he had been a boy. Now he was the same person, but legally a man.

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Workwoman Eleanor looked at him too. She smiled very unobtrusively to herself. She was on his side whenever any other person came into the picture; when they were alone, she nagged him as much as she dared. She had known his parents before they went offworld for a long-overdue honeymoon and were chewed into molecules by a battle between raiders and police. That gave her a proprietary feeling about him.

He tried to spiek to Doris with his mind, just to see if it would work.

It didn't. The two men bounded from their seats and ran for the yard, Eleanor sat in her chair holding tight to the table but saying nothing and aunt Doris screeched so loud that he could not make out the words.

He knew she meant "Stop it!", so he did, and looked at them friendly.

That started a fight.

Quarrels were common in Norstrilian life, because the Fathers had taught that they were therapeutic. Children could quarrel until adults told them to stop, freemen could quarrel as long as misters were not involved, misters could quarrel as long as an owner was not present, and owners could quarrel if, at the very end, they were willing to fight it out. No one could quarrel in the presence of an offworlder, nor during an alert, nor with a member of the defense or police on active duty.

Rod McBan was a mister and owner, but he was under trusteeship; he was a man, but he had not been given clear papers; he was a handicapped person.

The rules got all mixed up.

When Hopper came back to the table he muttered, "Do that again, laddie, and I'll clout you one that you won't forget!" Considering how rarely he used his voice, it was a beautiful man's voice, resonant, baritone, full-bodied, hearty and sincere in the way the individual words came out.

Bill didn't say a word, but from the contortions of his face Rod gathered that he was spieking to the others at a great rate and working off his grievance that way.

"If you're spieking about me, Bill," said Rod with a touch of arrogance which he did not really feel, "you'll do me the pleasure of using words or you'll get off my land!"

When Bill spoke, his voice was as rusty as an old machine. "I'll have you know, you clutty little pommy, that I have more money in my name on Sidney 'Change than you and your whole glubby land are worth. Don't you tell me twice to get

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off the land, you silly half of a mister, or I will get. So shut up!"

Rod felt his stomach knot with anger.

His anger became fiercer when he felt Eleanor's restraining hand on his arm. He didn't want another person, not one more damned useless normal person, to tell him what to do about spieking and hiering. Aunt Doris's face was still hidden in her apron; she had escaped, as she always did, into weeping.

Just as he was about to speak again, perhaps to lose Bill from the farm forever, his mind lifted in the mysterious way that it did sometime; he could hier for miles. The people around him did not notice the difference. He saw the proud rage of Bill, with his money in the Sidney Exchange, bigger than many station owners had, waiting his time to buy back on the land which his father had left; he saw the honest annoyance of Hopper and was a little abashed to see that Hopper was watching him proudly and with amused affection; in Eleanor he saw nothing but wordless worry, a fear that she might lose him as she had lost so many homes, for *hnnnhnnnhnn dzzmmmmm*, a queer meaningless reference which had a shape in her mind but took no form in his; and in aunt Doris he caught her inner voice calling, "Rod, Rod, Rod, come back! This may be your boy and I'm a McBan to the death, but I'll never know what to do with a cripple like him."

Bill was still waiting for him to answer when another thought came into his mind:

"You fool — go to your computer!"

"Who said that?" he thought, not trying to spiek again, but just thinking it with his mind.

"Your computer," said the faraway thinkvoice.

"You can't spiek!" said Rod. "You're a pure machine with not an animal brain in you."

"When you call me, Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBan to the hundred and fifty first, I can speak across space itself. I'm cued to you and you shouted just now with your spiekmind. I can feel you hiering me."

"But — " said Rod in words.

"Take it easy, lad," said Bill, right in the room with him. "Take it easy. I didn't mean it."

"You're having one of your spells," said Aunt Doris, emerging rednosed from behind her apron.

Rod stood up.

Said he to all of them, "I'm sorry. I'm going out for a bit."

"You're going to that bloody computer," said Bill.

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"Don't go, mister McBan," said Hopper, "don't let us anger you into going. It's bad enough being around that computer in daylight, but at night it must be horrible."

"How would you know?" retorted Rod. "You've never been there at night. And I have. Lots of times. . ."

"There are dead people in it," said Hopper. "It's an old war computer. Your family should never have bought it in the first place. It doesn't belong on a farm. A thing like that should be hung out in space and orbited."

"All right, Eleanor," said Rod, "you tell me what to do. Everybody else has," he added with the last bit of his remaining anger, as his hiering closed down and he saw the usual opaque faces around him at the uncleared table.

"It's no use, Rod. Go along to your computer. You've got a strange life and you're the one that will live it, Mister McBan, and not these other people around here."

Her words made sense to him, even then.

He stood up. "I'm sorry," said he, again, in lieu of a better good-by.

He stood in the doorway, hesitant. He would have liked to say good-by in a better way, but he did not know how to express it. Anyhow, he couldn't spiek, not so they could hier it with their minds; speaking with a voice was so crude, so flat for the fine little things that needed expression in life.

They looked at him, and he at them.

"Ngahh!" said he, in a raw cry of self-derision and fond disgust.

Their expressions showed that they had gotten his meaning, though the word carried nothing with it. Bill nodded, Hopper looked friendly and a little worried, Aunt Doris stopped snivelling and began to stretch out one hand, only to stop it in midgesture and Eleanor sat immobile at the table, upset by wordless troubles of her own.

He turned.

The cube of lamplight, the cabin room, was behind him. Ahead was the darkness of all Norstrilian nights, except for the weird rare times that they were cut up by traceries of lightness. He started off for a house which only a few but he could see, and which none but he could enter. It was a forgotten, invisible temple; it housed the MacArthur family computer, to which the older McBan computer was linked; and it was called the Palace of the Governor of Night.

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IX

Rod loped across the rolling land, *his* land.

Other Norstrilians, telepathically normal, would have taken fixes by hiering the words in nearby houses. Rod could not guide his walk by telepathy, so he whistled to himself in an odd off-key with lots of flats. Echoes, very faint, pulsed back to his unconscious mind; he got them through the overdeveloped hearing which he had worked out for not being able to hier with his mind. He sensed a slope ahead of himself and jogged up it; he avoided a clump of brush; he heard his youngest ram, Sweet William, two hills over, snoring the resounding snore of a santaclara-infected sheep.

Soon he would see it — the Palace of the Governor of Night, forever luminescent in the ultra-violet band. It was a Daimoni-built palace once, long, long ago. It had been built for the Governor of Night on Khufu II, where they used to raise the Furry Mountain Fur. But the Fur was gone and the Khufuans starved, and the palace had gone up for sale when there was no more a Governor of Night.

William MacArthur — "Wild William," they called him — had bought it for a prodigious price and shipped it to his farm. It was a replica of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, way back on Manhome Earth itself. Normal people could not see it, since it was visible only in the ultra-violet band. Sometimes, with a real mean dust storm, the dust outlined it and the palace then showed up in ghostly form . . . mysterious, sacred, useless, but very beautiful — to ordinary people.

For Rod it was the front gate to his old family computer, just as the secret passage in the gap was the back gate.

Only relatives of the McBans, with eyesight which ran into the ultra-violet, could see the building at normal times.

And now it belonged to Rod McBan, and housed his computer. His own computer.

He could speak to it at the extension which reached into the gap of hidden treasures. He talked to it, other times, at the talkpoint in the field, where the polished red-and-black metal of the old computer was reproduced in exquisite miniature. Or he could come to this strange building, the Palace of the Governor of Night, and stand as the worshippers of Diana had once stood, crying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

When he came in this way, he had the full console in front of him; it was automatically un-

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locked by his presence, just as his grandfather had showed him, three childhoods before, when the old McBan still had high hopes that Rod would turn into a normal Old North Australian boy. The grandfather, using his personal code in turn, unlocked the access controls and invited the computer to make its own foolproof recording of Rod, so that Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBan CLI would be forever known to the machine, no matter what age he attained, no matter how maimed or disguised he might be, no matter how sick or forlorn he might return to the machine of his forefathers. The old man did not even ask the machine how the identification was obtained. He trusted the computer.

Rod climbed the steps of the Palace. The columns stood with their ancient carving, bright in his second sight. He never quite knew how he could see with the ultra-violet, since he noticed no difference between himself and other people in the matter of eyesight, except that he more often got headaches in the open on clean-cloudy days. At a time like this, the effect was spectacular. It was his time, his temple, his own place. In the reflected light from the Palace, he could see that many of his cousins must have been out to see the Palace during the nights. They too could see it, as it was a family inheritance to be able to watch the invisible temple which one's friends could not see.

But they did not have access; he alone had that.

"Computer," he cried, "admit me!"

"Message unnecessary," said the computer. "You are always clear to enter." The voice was a male Norstrilian voice, with a touch of the theatrical in it. Rod was never quite sure that it was the voice of his own ancestor; when challenged directly as to whose voice it was using the machine had told him, "Input on that topic has been erased in me. I do not know. Historical evidence suggests that it was male, contemporary with my installation here, and past middle age when coded by me."

Rod would have felt lively and smart except for the feelings of awe which the Palace of the Governor of Night, standing bright and visible under the dark clouds of Norstrilia, had upon him. He wanted to say something lighthearted but at first he could only mutter:

"Here I am."

"Observed and respected," stated the computer-voice. "If I

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were a person I would say 'congratulations, since you are alive.' As a computer I have no opinion on the subject. I note the fact."

"What do I do now?" said Rod.

"Question too general," said the computer. "Do you want a drink of water or a rest-room? I can tell you where those are. Do you wish to play chess with me? I shall win just as many games as you tell me to."

"Shut up, you fool!" cried Rod. "That's not what I mean."

"Computers are fools only when they malfunction. I am not malfunctioning. The reference to me as a fool is therefore nonreferential and I shall expunge it from my memory system. Repeat the question, please."

"What do I do with my life?"

"You will work, you will marry, you will be the father of Rod McBan the hundred and fifty-second and several other children, you will die, your body will be sent into the endless orbit with great honor. You will do this well."

"Suppose I break my neck this very night?" argued Rod. "Then you would be wrong, wouldn't you?"

"I would be wrong, but I still have the probabilities with me."

"What do I do about the Onseck?"

"Repeat."

Rod had to tell the story several times before the computer understood it.

"I do not," said the computer, "find myself equipped with data concerning this one man whom you so confusingly allude to as Houghton Syme sometimes and as 'Old Hot and Simple' at other times. His personal history is unknown to me. The odds against your killing him undetected are 11,713 to 1 against success, because too many people know you and know what you look like. I must let you solve you own problem concerning the Hon. Sec."

"Don't you have any ideas?"

"I have answers, not ideas."

"Give me a piece of fruit cake and a glass of fresh milk, then."

"It will cost you twelve credits and by walking to your cabin you can get these things free. Otherwise I will have to buy them from Emergency Central."

"I said get them!" said Rod.

The machine whirred. Extra lights appeared on the console. "Emergency Central has authorized my own use of sheltered supplies. You will pay for the replacement tomorrow." A door opened. A tray slid out, with a luscious piece of fruit cake and a glass of foaming fresh milk.

Rod sat on the steps of his own palace and ate.

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Conversationally, he said to the computer, "You must know what to do about Old Hot and Simple. It's a terrible thing for me to go through the Garden of Death and then have a dull tool like that pester the life out of me."

"He cannot pester the life out of you. You are too strong."

"Recognize an idiom, you silly ass!" said Rod.

The machine paused. "Idiom identified. Correction made. Apologies are herewith given to you, Child McBan."

"Another mistake. I'm not Child McBan any more. I'm Mister and Owner McBan."

"I will check central," said the computer. There was another long pause as the lights danced. Finally the computer answered. "Your status is mixed. You are both. In an emergency you are already the Mister and Owner of the Station of Doom, including me. Without an emergency, you are still Child McBan until your trustees release you."

"When will they do that?"

"Voluntary action. Human. Timing uncertain. In four or five days, it would seem. When they release you, the Hon. Sec. will have the legal right to move for your arrest as an incompetent and dangerous owner. From your point of view, it will be very sad."

"And what do you think?" said Rod.

"I shall think that it is a disturbing factor. I speak the truth to you."

"And that is all?"

"All," said the computer.

"You can't stop the Hon. Sec.?"

"Not without stopping everybody else."

"What do you think people are, anyhow? Look here, computer, you have been talking to people for hundreds and hundreds of years. You know our names. You know my family. Don't you know anything about us? Can't you help me? What do you think I am?"

"Which question first?" said the computer.

Rod angrily threw the empty plate and glass on the floor of the temple. Robot arms flicked out and pulled them into the trash bin. He stared at the old polished metal of the computer. It ought to be polished. He had spent hundreds of hours polishing its case, all sixty-one panels of it, just because the machine was something which he could love.

"Don't you know me? Don't you know what I am?"

"You are Rod McBan the hundred and fifty-first. Anatomically, you are a spinal column with a small bone box at

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one end, the head, and with reproductive equipment at the other end. Inside the bone box you have a small portion of material which resembles stiff, bloody lard. With that you think — you think better than I do, even though I have over five hundred million synaptic connections. You are a wonderful object, Rod McBan. I can understand what you are made of. I cannot share your human animal side of life."

"But you know I'm in danger."

"I know it."

"What did you say, a while back, about not being able to stop Old Hot and Simple without stopping everybody else too? *Could* you stop everybody else?"

"Permission requested to correct error. I could not stop everyone. If I tried to use violence, the war computers at Commonwealth Defense would destroy me before I even started programming my own actions."

"You're partly a war computer."

"Admittedly," said the unwearied, unhurried voice of the computer, "but the Commonwealth made me safe before they let your forefathers have me."

"What *can* you do?"

"Rod McBan the hundred and fortieth told me to tell no one, ever."

"I override. Overridden."

"It's not enough to do that. Your great [8] - grandfather has a warning to which you must listen."

"Go ahead," said Rod.

There was a silence; Rod thought that the machine was searching through ancient archives for a drama cube.

Rod stood on the peristyle of the Palace of the Governor of Night and tried to see the Norstrilian clouds crawling across the sky near overhead. It felt like that kind of night; but it was very dark away from the illuminated temple porch and he could see nothing.

"Do you still command?" asked the computer.

"I didn't hear any warning," said Rod.

"He spieked it from a memory cube."

"Did you *hier* it?"

"I was not coded to it. It was human-to-human, McBan family only."

"Then," said Rod, "I override it."

"Overridden," said the computer. It was not programmed to concern itself with whether the effect of its orders had been what the originator intended.

"What can I do to stop *everybody?*"

"You can bankrupt Norstrilia temporarily, buy Old Earth It-

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self, and then negotiate on human terms for anything you want."

"Oh, lord!" said Rod. "You've gone logical again, computer! This is one of your as-if situations."

The computer voice did not change its tone. It could not. The sequence of the words held a reproach, however. "This is not an imaginary situation. I am a war computer, and I was designed to include economic warfare. If you did exactly what I told you to do, you could take over all Old North Australia by legal means."

"How long would we need? Two hundred years? Old Hot and Simple would have me in my grave by then."

The computer could not laugh, but it could pause. It paused. "I have just checked the time on the New Melbourne Exchange. The 'Change signal says they will open in seventeen minutes. I will need four hours for your voice to say what it must. That means you will need four hours and seventeen minutes, give or take five minutes."

"What makes you think *you* can do it?"

"I am a pure computer, obsolete model. All the others have animal brains built into them, to allow for error. I do not. Furthermore, your great ^{12} - grandfather hooked me into the defense net."

"Didn't the Commonwealth cut you out?"

"I am the only Computer which was built to tell lies. I lied to the Commonwealth when they checked on what I was getting. I am obliged to tell the truth only to you and to your designated descendants."

"I know that, but what does it have to do with it?"

"I predict my own space weather, *ahead of the Commonwealth.*" The accent was not in the pleasant, even-toned voice; Rod himself supplied it.

"You've tried this out?"

"I have war-gamed it more than a hundred million times. I had nothing else to do while I waited for you."

"You never failed?"

"I failed most of the time, when I first began. But I have not failed a war-game from real data for the last thousand years."

"What would happen if you failed now?"

"You would be disgraced and bankrupt. I would be sold and disassembled."

"Is that all?" said Rod cheerfully.

"Yes," said the computer.

"I could stop Old Hot and Simple if I owned Old Earth Itself. Let's go."

"I do not go anywhere."

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"I mean, let's start."

"You mean, to buy Earth, as we discussed?"

"What else?" yelled Rod. "What else have we been talking about?"

"You must have some soup, hot soup and a tranquilizer first. I cannot work at optimum if I have a human being who gets excited."

"All right," said Rod.

"You must authorize me to buy them."

"I authorize you."

"That will be three credits."

"In the name of the seven healthy sheep, what does it matter? How much will Earth cost?"

"Seven thousand million million megacredits."

"Deduct three for the soup and the pill then," shouted Rod, "if it won't spoil your calculations."

"Deducted," said the computer. The tray with the soup appeared, a white pill beside it.

"Now let's buy Earth."

"Drink your soup and take your pill first," said the computer.

Rod gulped down his soup, washing the pill down with it.

"Now, let's go, cobber."

"Repeat after me," said the computer, "I herewith mortgage the whole body of the said sheep Sweet William for the sum of five hundred thousand credits to the New Melbourne Exchange on the open board..."

Rod repeated it.

The process of buying Earth had begun.

He repeated it —and repeated it — and repeated it.

The house became a nightmare of repetition.

The computer lowered its voice to a low murmur, almost a whisper. When Rod stumbled in the messages, the computer prompted him.

Forward purchase . . . sell short . . . option to buy . . . preemptive margin . . . offer to sell . . . offer temporarily reserved . . . first collateral . . . second collateral . . . deposit to drawing account . . . convert to FOE credits . . . hold in SAD credits . . . twelve thousand tons of stroon . . . mortgage forward . . . promise to buy . . . promise to sell . . . hold . . . margin . . . collateral guaranteed by previous deposits . . . promise to pay against the pledged land . . . guarantor . . . McBan land . . . MacArthur land . this computer itself. . .conditional legality . . buy . . . sell . . . guarantee . . . pledge . . . withhold . . . offer confirmed . . . offer cancelled . . . four thousand million megacredits . . . rate accepted . .. rate refused . . . forward purchase . . . deposit against interest . . . collateral previously pledged

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. . . conditional appreciation . . . guarantee . . . accept title . . . refuse delivery . . solar weather . . . buy . . . sell . . .pledge . . . withdraw from market . . . withdraw from sale . . . not available . . . no collections now . . . dependent on radiation . . . corner market . . . buy . . . buy . . . buy . . . buy . . . buy . . . firm title . . reconfirm title . . . transactions completed . . . reopen . . . register . . . re-register . . . confirm at Earth central . . . message fees . . . fifteen thousand megacredits. . .

Rod's voice became a whisper, but the computer was sure, the computer was untiring, the computer answered all questions from the outside.

Many times Rod and the computer both were given telepathic warnings built into the markets communications net. The computer was cut out and Rod could not hier them. The warnings went unheard.

. . . buy . . . sell . . . hold . . . confirm . . . deposit . . . convert guarantee . . . arbitrage . . . message fee . . . Commonwealth tax . . . commission . . . buy . . . sell . . . buy . . . buy . . . buy . . . buy . . . deposit title! deposit title! deposit title!

By the time that the first pretty parts of silver-gray dawn had begun, it was done. Rod was dizzy with fatigue and confusion.

"Go home and sleep," said the computer. "When people find out what you have done with me, many of them will probably be excited and will wish to talk to you at great length. I suggest you say nothing."

X

Drunk with fatigue, Rod stumbled across his own land back to his cabin.

He could not believe that anything had happened.

If the Palace of the Governor of Night —

If the computer spoke the truth, he was already the wealthiest human being who had ever lived. He had gambled and won not a few tons of stroon or a planet or two, but credits enough to shake the Commonwealth to its foundation. He owned the Earth, on the system that any overdeposit could be called due at a certain very high margin. He owned planets, countries, mines, places, prisons, police systems, fleets, border guards, restaurants, pharmaceuticals, textiles, night clubs, treasures, royalties, licenses, sheep, land, stroon, more sheep, more land, more stroon.

He had won.

Only in Old North Australia could a man have done this

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without being besieged by soldiers, reports, guards, police, investigators, tax-collectors, fortune-seekers, doctors, publicity hounds, the sick, the inquisitive, the compassionate, the angry and the affronted.

Old North Australia kept calm.

Privacy, simplicity, frugality — these virtues had carried them through the hell-world of Paradise VII, where the mountains ate people, the volcanoes poisoned sheep, the delirious oxygen made men rave with bliss as they pranced to their own deaths. The Norstrilians had survived many things, including sickness and deformity. If Rod McBan had caused a financial crisis, there were no newspapers to print it, no viewboxes to report it, nothing to excite the people. The Commonwealth authorities would pick the crisis out of their "in" baskets sometime after tucker and tea the next morning, and by afternoon he, his crisis and the computer would be in the "out" baskets.

If the deal had worked, the whole thing would be paid off honestly and literally. If the deal had not worked out the way that the computer had said, his lands would be up for auction and he himself would be led gently away.

But that's what the Onseck was going to do to him anyway — Old Hot and Simple, a tiring dwarf-lifed man, driven by the boyhood hatred of many long years ago!

Rod stopped for a minute. Around him stretched the rolling plains of his own land. Far ahead, to his left, there gleamed the glassy worm of a river-cover, the humped long barrel-like line which kept the precious water from evaporating. That too was his.

Maybe — after the night now passed.

He thought of flinging himself to the ground and sleeping right there. He had done it before.

But not this morning.

Not when he might be the person he might be — the man who made the worlds reel with his wealth.

The computer had started easy. He could not take control of his property except for an emergency. The computer had made him create the emergency by selling his next three years production of santaclara at the market price. That was a serious enough emergency for any pastoralist to be in deep, sure trouble.

From that the rest had followed.

Rod sat down.

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He was not trying to remember. The remembering was crowding into his mind. He wanted just to get his breath, to get on home, to sleep.

A tree was near him, with a thermostatically controlled cover which domed it in whenever the winds were too strong or too dry, and an underground sprinkler which kept it alive when surface moisture was not sufficient. It was one of the old MacArthur extravagances which his McBan ancestor had inherited and had added to the Station of Doom. It was a modified Earth oak, very big, a full thirteen meters high. Rod was proud of it though he did not like it much, but he had relatives who were obsessed by it and would make a three-hour ride just to sit in the shade — dim and diffuse as it was — of a genuine tree from Earth.

When he looked at the tree, a violent noise assailed him.

Mad frantic laughter—

Laughter beyond all jokes—

Laughter sick, wild, drunk, dizzy!

He started to be angry and was then puzzled. Who could be laughing at him already? As a matter of nearer fact, who could be trespassing on his land? Anyhow, what was there to laugh about?

(All Norstrilians knew that humor was "pleasurable corrigible malfunction." It was in the Book of Rhetoric which their Appointed Relatives had to get them through if they were even to qualify for the tests of the Garden of Death since there were no schools, no classes, no teachers, no libraries except for private ones. There were just the seven liberal arts, the six practical sciences, and the five collections of police and defense studies. Specialists were trained off-world, but they were trained only from among the survivors of the Garden, and nobody could get as far as the Garden unless the sponsors, who staked their lives along with that of the student — so far as the question of aptness was concerned — guaranteed that the entrant knew the eighteen kinds of Nostrilian Knowledge. The Book of Rhetoric came second, right after the Book of Sheep and Numbers, so that all Norstrilians knew why they laughed and what there was to laugh about.)

But this laughter! Aagh, who could it be?

A sick man? Impossible. Hostile hallucinations brought on by the Hon. Sec. in his own onseckish way with unusual telepathic powers? Scarcely.

Rod began to laugh himself

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as he realized what the sound must be.

It was something rare and beautiful, a kookaburra bird, the same kind of bird which had laughed in Original Australia on Old Old Earth. A very few had reached this new planet. They had not multiplied well, even though the Norstrilians respected them and loved them and wished them well.

Good luck came with their wild birdish laughter. A man could feel he had a fine day ahead. Lucky in love, thumb in an enemy's eye, new ale in the fridge or a ruddy good chance on the market.

Laugh, bird, laugh! thought Rod.

Perhaps the bird understood him. The laughter increased and reached maniac, hilarious proportions. The bird sounded as though it was watching the most comical bird-comedy which any bird-audience had ever been invited to, as though the bird-jokes were side-splitting convulsive gut popping, unbelievable, racy, daring and overwhelming. The bird-laughter became hysterical and a note of fear, of warning crept in.

Rod stepped toward the tree.

In all this time he had not seen the kookaburra.

He squinted into the tree, peering against the brighter side of the sky which showed the morning had arrived well.

To him, the tree was blindingly green, since it kept most of its earth color, not turning beige or gray as the earth grasses had done when they had been adapted and planted in Norstrilian soil.

To be sure, the bird was there, a tiny slender laughing impudent shape.

Suddenly the bird cawed: this was no laugh.

Startled, Rod stepped back and started to look around for danger.

The step saved his life.

The sky whistled at him, the wind hit him, a dark shape shot past him with the speed of projectile and was gone. As it leveled out just above the ground, Rod saw what it was.

A mad sparrow.

Sparrows had reached twenty kilos' weight, with straight sword-like beaks almost a meter in length. Most of the time the Commonwealth left them alone. They performed a useful function; they preyed on the giant lice, the size of footballs, which had grown with the sick sheep. But now and then one of the birds went mad and attacked people.

Rod turned, watching the sparrow as it walked around,

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about a hundred meters away.

Some mad sparrows, it was rumored, were not mad at all, but were tame sparrows sent on death by Norstrilian men whose minds had been twisted into crime. This was rare, but possible.

Could the Onseck already be attacking?

Rod slapped his belt for weapons as the sparrow took to the air again, flapping upward with the pretense of innocence. He had nothing except his beltlight and a canister. This would not hold out long unless somebody came along. What could a tired man do, using bare hands, against a sword which burst through the air with a monomaniac birdbrain behind it?

Rod braced himself for the bird's next power-dive, holding the canister like a shield.

The canister was not much of a shield.

Down came the bird, preceded by the whistle of air against its head and beak. Rod watched for the eyes and when he saw them, he jumped.

The dust roared up as the giant sparrow twisted its spear-like beak out of the line of the ground, opened its wings, beat the air against gravity, caught itself centimeters from the surface and flapped away with powerful strokes; Rod stood and watched quietly, glad that he had escaped.

Rain was so rare in the Norstrilian plains that he did not see how he could have gotten wet. He glanced down idly.

Blood it was, and his own.

The kill-bird had missed him with its beak but had touched him with the razor-like wing-feathers, which had mutated into weapons; both the rhachis and the vane in the large feathers were tremendously reinforced, with the development of a bitterly sharp hyporhachis in the case of the wingtips. The bird had cut him so fast he had not felt or noticed it.

Like any good Norstrilian, he thought in terms of first aid.

The flow of blood was not very rapid. Should he try to tie up his arm first or to hide from the next diving attack?

The bird answered his question for him.

The ominous whistle sounded again.

Rod flung himself along the ground, trying to get to the base of the tree trunk, where the bird could not dive on him.

The bird, making a serious mental mistake, thought it had disabled him. With a flutter of wings it landed calmly, stood on its feet and cocked its head to look him over. When the bird moved its head, the sword-beak

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gleamed evilly in the weak sunshine.

Rod reached the tree and started to lift himself up by seizing the trunk.

Doing this, he almost lost his life. He had forgotten how fast the sparrows could run on the ground.

In one second, the bird was standing, comical and evil, studying him with its sharp, bright eyes; the next second, the knife-beak was into him, just below the bony part of the shoulder.

He felt the eerie wet pull of the beak being drawn out of his body, the ache in his surprised flesh which would precede the griping pain. He hit at the bird with his belt-light. He missed.

By now he was weakened from his two wounds. The arm was still dripping blood steadily and he felt his shorts get wet as blood poured from his shoulder.

The bird, backing off, was again studying him by cocking its head. Rod tried to guess his chances. One square blow from his hand, and the bird was dead. The bird had thought him disabled — but now he really was partially disabled.

If his blow did not land, score one mister for the bird, mark a credit for the Hon. Sec., give Old Hot and Simple the victory!

By now Rod had not the least doubt that Houghton Syme was behind the attack.

The bird rushed.

Rod forgot to fight the way he had planned.

He kicked instead and caught the bird right in its heavy, coarse body.

It felt like a very big football filled with sand.

The kick hurt his foot but the bird was flung a good six or seven meters away. Rod rushed behind the tree and looked back at the bird. The blood was pulsing fast out of his shoulder.

The kill-bird had gotten to his feet and was walking firmly and securely around the tree. One of the wings trailed a little; the kick seemed to have hurt a wing, but not the legs or that horribly strong neck.

Once again the bird cocked its comical head. It was his own blood which dripped from the long beak, now red, which had gleamed silver gray at the beginning of the fight. Rod wished he had studied more about these birds. He had never been this close to a mutated sparrow before and he had no idea of how to fight one. All he had known was that they attacked people on very rare occasions and that sometimes the people died in the encounters.

He tried to spiek, to let out a

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scream which would bring the neighborhood and the police flying and running toward him. He found he had no telepathy at all, not when he had to concentrate his whole mind and attention on the bird, knowing that its very next move could bring him irretrievable death. This was no temporary death with the rescue squads nearby. There was no one in the neighborhood, no one at all, except for the excited and sympathetic kookaburras haha-ing madly in the above.

He shouted at the bird, hoping to frighten it.

The kill-bird paid him no more attention than if it had been a deaf reptile.

The foolish head tipped this way and that. The little bright eyes watched him. The red sword-beak, rapidly turning brown in the dry air, probed abstract dimensions for a way to his brain or heart. Rod took time to wonder how the bird solved its problems in solid geometry — movement of the beak, the the angle of approach, the line of thrust, the movement of the beak, the weight and direction of the fleeing object, himself.

He jumped back a few centimeters, intending to look at the bird from the other side of the tree-trunk.

There was a hiss in the air, like the helpless hiss of a gentle little snake.

The bird, when he saw it, looked odd: suddenly it seemed to have two beaks.

Rod marveled.

He did not really understand what was happening until the bird leaned over suddenly, fell on its side, and lay — plainly dead — on the dry cool ground. The eyes were still open but they looked blank. The bird's body twitched a little. The wings opened out in a dying spasm. One of the wings almost struck the trunk of the tree, but the tree-guarding device raised a plastic shaft to ward off the blow; a pity the device had not been designed as a people-guard as well.

Only then did Rod see that the second "beak" was no beak at all, but a javelin, its point biting cleanly and tightly right through the bird's skull into its brain.

No wonder the bird had dropped dead quickly!

XI

As Rod looked around to see who his rescuer might be, the ground rose up and struck him.

He had fallen.

The loss of blood was faster than he had allowed for.

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He looked around, almost like a child in his bewilderment and dizziness. There was a shimmer of turquoise and the girl Lavinia was standing over him. She had a medical pack open and was spraying his wounds with cryptoderm — the living bandage which was so expensive that only on Norstrilia, the exporter of stroon, could it be carried around in emergency cans.

"Keep quiet," she said with her voice. "Keep quiet, Rod. We've got to stop the blood first of all. Lands of mercy, but you're a crashing mess!"

"Who . . . ?" said Rod weakly.

"The Hon. Sec.," said she immediately.

"You *know?*" he asked, amazed that she should understand everything so very quickly indeed.

"Don't talk, and I'll tell you." She had taken her field-knife and was cutting the sticky shirt off him, so that she could lift the bottle and spray right into the wound. "I just suspected you were in trouble, when Bill rode by the house and said some thing crazy, that you had bought half the galaxy by gambling all night with a crazy machine which paid off. I did not know where you were, but I thought that you might be in that old temple of yours that the rest of them can't see. I didn't know what kind of danger to look for, so I brought this." She slapped her hip. Rod's eyes widened. She had stolen her father's one-kiloton grenade, which was to be removed from its rack only in the event of off-world attack. She answered his question before he asked her. "It's all right. I made a dummy to take its place before I touched it. Then, as I took it out, the Defense monitor came on and I just explained that I had hit it with my new broom which was longer than usual. Do you think I would let Old Hot and Simple kill you, Rod, without a fight from me? I'm your cousin, your kith and kin. As a matter of fact, I'm number twelve after you when it comes to inheriting Doom and all the wonderful things there are on this station."

Rod said, "Give me water." He suspected she was chattering to keep his attention off what she was doing to his shoulder and arm. The arm glowed once when she sprayed the cryptoderm on it; then it settled down to more aching. The shoulder had exploded from time to time as she probed it. She had thrust a diagnostic needle into it and was reading the tiny bright picture on the end of the needle. He knew it had both analgesics and antiseptics as well as an ultra-miniaturized X-ray, but he

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did not think that anyone would be willing to use it unaided in the field.

She answered this question, too, before he asked it. She was a very perceptive girl.

"We don't know what the Onseck is going to do next. He may have corrupted people as well as animals, I don't dare call for help, not until you have your friends around you. Certainly not, if you have bought half the worlds."

Rod dragged out the words. He seemed short of breath. "How did you know it was him?"

"I saw his face. I hiered it when I looked in the bird's own brain. I could see Houghton Syme, talking to the bird in some kind of odd way, and I could see your dead body through the bird's eyes, and I could feel a big wave of love and approval, happiness and reward, going through the bird when the job was to have been finished. I think that man is evil. Evil!"

"You know him, yourself?"

"What girl around here doesn't? He's a nasty man. He had a boyhood that was all rotten from the time that he realized he was a short-lifer. He has never gotten over it. Some people are sorry for him and don't mind his getting the job of Hon. Sec. If I'd had my way, I'd have sent him to the giggle room long ago!" Lavinia's face was set in prudish hate, an expression so unlike herself, who usually was bright and gay, that Rod wondered what deep bitterness might have been stirred within her.

"Why do you hate him?"

"For what he did."

"What did he do?"

"He looked at me," she said, "he looked at me in a way that no girl can like. And then he crawled all over my mind, trying to show me all the silly, dirty, useless things he wanted to do."

"But he didn't really *do* anything — -" said Rod.

"Yes, he did," she snapped. "Not with his hands. I could have reported him. I would have. It's what he did with his mind, the things he spieked to me."

"You can report those too," said Rod, very tired of talking but nevertheless mysteriously elated to discover that he was not the only enemy which the Onseck had made.

"Not what he did, I couldn't," said Lavinia, her face set in anger but dissolving into grief. Grief was tenderer, softer, but deeper and more real than anger. For the first time Rod

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sensed a feeling of concern about Lavinia. What might be wrong with her?

She looked past him and spoke to the open fields and the big dead bird. "Houghton Syme was the worst man I've ever known. I hope he dies. He never got over that rotten boyhood of his. The old sick boy is the enemy of the man. We'll never know what he might have been. And if you hadn't been so wrapped up in your own troubles, mister Rod to the hundred and fifty first, you'd have remembered who *I* am."

"Who are you?" said Rod, naturally.

"I'm the Father's Daughter."

"So what?" said Rod. "All girls are."

"Then you never have found out about me. I'm *the* Father's Daughter from *The Father's Daughter's Song*."

"Never heard it."

She looked at him and her eyes were close to tears. "Listen, then, and I'll sing it to you now. And it's true, true, true.

You do not know what the world is like
And I hope that you never will.
My heart was once much full of hope,
But now it is very still.
My wife went mad.

She was my love and wore my ring
When both of us were young.
She bore my babes, but then, but then . . .
And now there isn't anything.
My wife went mad.

Now she lives in another place.
Half sick, half well, and never young.
I am her dread, who was her love.
Each of us has another face.
My wife went mad.

You do not know what the world is like.
War is never the worst of it.
The stars within your eyes can drop.
The lightning in your brain can strike.
My wife went mad.

And I see you have heard it, too," she sighed. "Just as my father wrote it. About my mother. My own mother."

"Oh, Lavinia," said Rod, "I'm sorry. I never thought it was you. And you my own cousin only three or four times removed. But Lavinia, there's something wrong. How can your mother be mad if she was looking fine at my house last week?"

"She was never mad," said Lavina. "My father was. He made up that cruel song about my mother so that the neighbors complained. He had his choice of the Giggle Room to die in, or the sickplace, to be immortal and insane. He's there *now*. And the Onseck, the Onseck threatened to bring him back to our neighborhood if I didn't do what he asked. Do you think I could forgive *that?* Ever? After people have sung that hateful song at me ever since I was a baby? Do you wonder that I know it myself?"

Rod nodded. Lavinia's troubles impressed him, but he had

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troubles of his own. The sun was never hot on Norstrilia, but he suddenly felt thirsty and hot. He wanted to sleep but he wondered about the dangers which surrounded him.

She knelt beside him.

"Close your eyes a bit, Rod. I will spiek very quietly and maybe nobody will notice it except your station hands, Bill and Hopper. When they come we'll hide out for the day and tonight we can go back to your computer and hide. I'll tell them to bring food."

She hesitated, "And, Rod?"

"Yes?" he said.

"Forgive me."

"For what?"

"For my troubles," she said contritely.

"Now you have more troubles. Me," he said. "Let's not blame ourselves, but for sheeps' sake, girl, let me sleep."

He drifted off to sleep as she sat beside him, whistling a loud clear tune with long long notes which never added up. He knew some people, usually women, did that when they tried to concentrate on their telepathic spieking.

Once he glanced up at her before he finally slept. He noticed that her eyes were a deep, strange blue. Like the mad, wild, faraway skies of Old Earth Itself.

He slept, and in his sleep he knew that he was being carried.

The hands which carried him felt friendly, though, and he curled himself back into deep, deeper dreamless sleep.

XII

When Rod finally awakened, it was to feel his shoulder tightly bound and his arm throbbing. He had fought waking up, because the pain had increased as his mind moved toward consciousness, but the pain and the murmur of voices caused him to come all the way to the hard, bright surface of consciousness.

The murmur of voices?

There was no place on all Old North Australia where voices murmured. People sat around and spieked to each other and answered without the clatter of vocal cords. Telepathy made for brilliant and quick conversation, the participants darting their thoughts this way and that, soaring with their shields so as to produce the effect of a confident whisper.

But here there were voices. Many voices. Not possible!

And the smell was wrong. The air was wet — luxuriously, extravagantly wet, like a miser trying to catch a rainstorm!

It was almost like the van of the Garden of Death.

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Just as he woke, he recognized Lavinia singing an odd little song. It was one which Rod knew, because it had a sharp, catchy, poignant little melody to it which sounded like nothing on his world. She was singing, and it sounded like one of the weird sadnesses which his people had brought from their horrible group experience on the abandoned planet of Paradise VII:

Is there anybody here or is everybody dead at the grey green blue black lake?

The sky was blue and now it is red over old tall green brown trees.

The house was big but now it looks small at the grey green blue black lake,

And the girl that I knew isn't there any more at the old flat dark torn place.

His eyes opened. It was indeed Lavinia whom he saw at the edge of vision. This was no house. It was a box, a hospital, a prison, a ship, a cave or a fort. The furnishings were machined and luxurious. The light was artificial and almost the color of peaches. A strange hum in the background sounded like alien engines dispensing power for purposes which Norstrilian law never permitted to private persons. The Lord Redlady leaned over Rod; the fantastic man broke into song himself, chanting—

Light a lantern,
Light a lantern,
Light a lantern,
Here we come.

When he saw the obvious signs of Rod's perplexity, he burst into a laugh,

"That's the oldest song you ever heard, my boy. It's prespace. It used to be called 'general quarters' where ships like big iron houses floated on the waters of earth and fought each other. We've been waiting for you to wake up."

"Water," said Rod, "please give me water. Why are you talking?"

"Water!" cried the Lord Redlady to someone behind him. His sharp, thin face was alight with excitement as he turned back to Rod. "And we're talking because I have my buzzer on. If people want to talk to each other, they jolly well better use their voices in this ship."

"Ship?" said Rod, reaching for the mug of cold water which a hand had reached out to him.

"This is my ship, mister and owner Rod McBan to the hundred and fifty-first! An earth ship. I pulled it out of orbit and grounded it with the permission of the Commonwealth. They don't know you're on it, yet. They can't find out right now, because my Humanoid-Robot Brainwave Dephasing Device is on. Nobody can think in or out

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through that, and anybody who tries telepathy on this boat is going to get himself a headache."

"Why you?" said Rod. "What for?"

"In due time," said the Lord Redlady. "Let me introduce you first. You know these people." He waved at a group.

Lavinia sat with his hands, Bill and Hopper, with his workwoman Eleanor, with his Aunt Doris. They looked odd, sitting on the low, soft, luxurious earth furniture. They were all sipping some earth drink of a color which Rod had never seen before. Their expressions were diverse. Bill looked truculent, Hopper looked greedy, Aunt Doris looked utterly embarrassed and Lavinia looked as though she were enjoying herself.

"And then here..." said the Lord Redlady.

The man he pointed to might not have been a man. He was the Norstrilian type all right. But he was a giant, of the kind which were always killed in the Garden of Death.

"At your service," said the giant, who was almost three meters tall and who had to watch his head, lest it hit the ceiling. "I am Donald Dumfrie Hordern Anthony Garwood Gaines Wentworth to the fourteenth generation, mister and owner McBan. A military surgeon, at your service, sir!"

"But this is private. Surgeons aren't allowed to work for anybody but government."

"I am on loan to the Earth Government," said Wentworth, the giant, his face in a broad grin.

"And I," said the Lord Redlady, "am both the Instrumentality and the Earth Government for diplomatic purposes. I borrowed him. He's under Earth rules. You will be well in two or three hours."

The doctor, Wentworth, looked at his hand as though he saw a chronograph there,

"Two hours and seventeen minutes more."

"Let it be," said the Lord Redlady. "Here's our last guest."

A short angry man stood up and came over. He glared out at Rod and held forth an angry hand. "John Fisher to the hundreth. You know me."

"Do I?" said Rod, not impolitely. He was just dazed.

"Station of The Good Fresh Joey," said Fisher.

"I haven't been there," said Rod, "but I've heard of it."

"You needn't have," snapped the angry Fisher. "I met you at your grandfather's."

"Oh, yes, mister and owner Fisher," said Rod, not really remembering anything at all, but

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wondering why the short red-faced man was so angry with him.

"You don't know who I am?" said Fisher.

"Silly games!" thought Rod. He said nothing but smiled dimly. Hunger began to stir inside him.

"Commonwealth Financial Secretary, that's me," said Fisher. "I handle the books and the credits for the government."

"Wonderful work," said Rod "I'm sure it's complicated. Could I have something to eat?"

The Lord Redlady interrupted: "Would you like French pheasant with Chinesian sauce steeped in the thieves' wine from Viola Siderea? It would only cost you six thousand tons of refined gold, orbited near earth, if I ordered it sent to you by special courier."

For some inexplicable reason the entire room howled with laughter.

The men put their glasses down so as not to spill them. Hopper seized the opportunity to refill his own glass. Aunt Doris looked hilarious and secretly proud, as though she herself had laid a diamond egg or done some equal marvel. Only Lavinia, though laughing, managed to look sympathetically at Rod to make sure that he did not feel mocked. The Lord Redlady laughed as loudly as the rest, and even the short, angry John Fisher allowed himself a wan smile, while holding out his hand for a refill on his drink. An animal, a little one which looked very much like an extremely small person, lifted up the bottle and filled his glass for him; Rod suspected that it was a "monkey" from Old Old Earth, from the stories he had heard.

Rod didn't even say, "What's the joke?" though he realized plainly that he was himself in the middle of it. He just smiled weakly back at them, feeling the hunger grow within him.

"My robot is cooking you an Earth dish. French toast with maple syrup. You could live ten thousand years on this planet and never get it. Rod, don't you know why we're laughing? Don't you know what you've done?"

"The Onseck tried to kill me, I think," said Rod.

Lavinia clapped her hand to her mouth, but it was too late.

"So that's who it was," said the doctor, Wentworth, with a voice as gigantic as himself.

"But you wouldn't laugh at me for that —" Rod started to say. Then he stopped himself.

An awufl thought had come.

"You mean, it *really worked?*

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That stuff with my family's old computer?"

The laughter broke out again. It was kind laughter, but it was always the laughter of a peasant people, driven by boredom, who greet the unfamiliar with attack or with laughter.

"You did it," said Hopper. "You've bought a billion worlds."

John Fisher snapped at him, "Let's not exaggerate. He's gotten about one point six stroon years. You couldn't buy any billion worlds for that. In the first place, there aren't a billion settled worlds, not even a million. In the second place, there aren't many worlds for sale. I doubt that he could buy thirty or forty."

The little animal, prompted by some imperceptible sign from the Lord Redlady, went out of the room and returned with a tray. The odor from the tray made all the people in the room sniff appreciatively. The food was unfamiliar, but it combined pungency and sweetness. The monkey fitted the tray into an artfully concealed slot at the head of Rod's couch, took off an imaginary monkey cap, saluted and went back to his basket behind the Lord Redlady's chair.

The Lord Redlady nodded. "Eat boy, it's on me."

Rod sat up. His shirt was still blood-caked and he realized that it was almost worn out.

"That's an odd sight, I must say," said the huge doctor Wentworth. "There's the richest man in many worlds, and he hasn't the price of a new pair of overalls."

"What's odd about that? We've always charged an import fee of twenty million per cent of the orbit price of goods," snapped angry John Fisher. "Have you ever realized what other people have swung into orbit around our sun, just waiting for us to change our minds so they could sell us half the rubbish in the universe? This world would be knee-deep in junk if we ever dropped our tariff. I'm surprised at you, doctor, forgetting the fundamental rules of Old North Australia!"

"He's not complaining," said Aunt Doris, whom the drink had made loquacious. "He's just thinking. We all think."

"Of course we all think. Or daydream. Some of us leave and go off-planet to be rich people on other worlds. A few of us even manage to get back here on severe probation when we realize what the off worlds are like. I'm just saying," said the doctor, "that Rod's situation would be very funny to everybody except us Norstrilians.

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We're all rich with the stroon imports, but we kept ourselves poor in order to survive."

"Who's poor?" snapped the fieldhand Hopper, apparently touched at a sensitive point. "I can match you with megacredits, doc, any time you care to gamble. Or I'll meet you with throwing knives, if you want them better. I'm as good as the next man!"

"That's exactly what I mean," said John Fisher. "Hopper here can argue with anybody on the planet. We're still equals. We're still free. We're not the victims of our own wealth — that's Norstrilia for you!"

Rod looked up from his food and said, "Mister and owner secretary Fisher, you talk awfully well for somebody who is not a freak like me. How do you do it?"

Fisher started looking angry again, though he was not really angry: "Do you think that financial records can be dictated telepathically? I'm spending centuries out of my life, just dictating into my blasted microphone. Yesterday I spent most of the day dictating the mess which you have made of the Commonwealth's money for the next eight years. And you know what I'm going to do at the next meeting of the council?"

"What?" said Rod.

"I'm going to move the condemnation of that computer of yours. It's too good to be in private hands."

"You can't do that!" shrieked Aunt Doris, somewhat mellowed by the earth beverage she was drinking. "It's MacArthur and McBan family property!"

"You can keep the temple," said Fisher with a snort. "But no bloody family is going to outguess the whole planet again. Do you know that boy sitting there has four megacredits on Earth at this moment?"

Bill hiccupped, "I got more than that myself."

Fisher snarled at him, "*On earth?* FOE money?"

A silence hit the room.

"FOE money. Four megacredits? He can buy Old Australia and ship it out here to us." Bill sobered fast.

Said Lavinia mildly, "What's foe money?"

"Do you know, mister and owner McBan?" said Fisher, in a peremptory tone. "You had better know, because you have more of it than any man has ever had before."

"I don't want to talk about money," said Rod. "I want to find out what the Onseck is up to."

"Don't worry about him!" laughed the Lord Redlady,

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prancing to his feet and pointing at himself with a dramatic forefinger. "As the representative of Earth, I filed six hundred and eighty-five lawsuits against him simultaneously, in the name of your Earth debtors, who fear that some harm might befall you."

"Do they really?" said Rod. "Already?"

"Of course not. All they know is your name and the fact that you bought them out. But they *would* worry if they *did* know, so as your agent I tied up the Hon. Sec. Houghton Syme with more law cases than this planet has ever seen before."

The big doctor chuckled. "Dashed clever of you, my lord and mister! You know us Norstrilians pretty well, I must say. If we charge a man with murder, we're so freedom-minded that he has time to commit a few more before being tried for the first one. But civil suits! Hot sheep! He'll never get out of those, as long as he lives."

"Is he onsecking any more?" said Rod.

"What do you mean?" asked Fisher.

"Does he still have his job — Onseck?"

"Oh, yes," said Fisher. "But we put him on two hundred years' leave and he had only about a hundred and twenty years to live, poor fellow. Most of that time he will be defending himself in civil suits."

Rod finally exhaled. He had finished the food. The small polished room with its machined elegance, the wet air, the bray of voices all over the place — these made him feel dreamlike. Here grown men were standing, talking as though he really did own Old Earth. They were concerned with his affairs, not because he was Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBan the hundred-and-fifty-first, but because he was Rod, a boy among them who had stumbled upon danger and fortune.

He looked around the room. The conversations had accidentally stopped. They were looking at him, and he saw in their faces something which he had seen before. What was it? It was not love. It was a rapt attentiveness, combined with a sort of pleasurable and indulgent interest. He then realized what the looks signified. They were giving him the adoration which they usually reserved only for cricket players, tennis players, and great track performers — like that fabulous Hopkins Harvey fellow who had gone offworld and won a wrestling match with a "heavy man" from Wereld Schemering. He was not just

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Rod any more. He was their boy.

As their boy, he smiled at them vaguely and felt like crying.

XIII

The breathlessness broke when the large doctor, mister and owner Wentworth threw in a stark comment:

"Time to tell him, mister and owner Fisher. He won't have his property long if we don't get moving. No, nor his life either."

Lavinia jumped up and cried out, "You can't kill Rod—"

Doctor Wentworth stopped her. "Sit down. We're not going to kill him. And you there, stop acting foolish! We're his *friends* here."

Rod followed the line of the doctor's glance and saw that Hopper had snaked his hand back to the big knife he wore in his belt. He was getting ready to fight anyone who attacked Rod.

"Sit, sit down, all of you, please!" said the Lord Redlady, speaking somewhat fussily with his singsong Earth accent. "I'm host here. Nobody's killing Rod tonight. Doctor, you take my table. Sit down yourself. You will stop threatening my ceiling or your head. You, ma'am and owner," said he to Aunt Doris, "move over there to that other chair. Now we can all see the doctor."

"Can't we wait?" asked Rod. "I need to sleep. Are you going to ask me to make decisions now? I'm not up to decisions, not after what I've just been through. All night with the computer. The long walk. The bird from the Onseck—"

"You'll have no decisions to make if you don't make them tonight," said the doctor firmly and pleasantly. "You'll be a dead man."

"Who's going to kill me?" asked Rod.

"Anybody who wants money. Or who wants power. Or who would like unlimited life. Or who needs these things to get something else. Revenge. A woman. An obsession. A drug. You're not just a person now, Rod. You're Norstrilia incarnate. You're Mr. Money himself! Don't ask who'd kill you. Ask who wouldn't. Us, I think. But don't tempt us."

"How much money have I got?" said Rod.

Angry John Fisher cut in: "So much that the computers are clotted up, just counting it. About one and a half stroon years. Perhaps three hundred years of Old Earth's total income. You sent more Instant Messages last night than the Commonwealth government it-

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self has sent in the last twelve years. Those messages are expensive. One kilocredit each, paid in foe money."

"I asked a long time ago what this 'foe money' was," said Lavinia, "and nobody has got around to telling me."

The Lord Redlady took the middle of the floor. He stood there with a stance which none of the Old North Australians had ever seen before. It was actually the posture of a master of ceremonies opening the evening at a large night club, but to people who had never seen those particular gestures, his movements were eerie, self-explanatory and queerly beautiful.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, using a phrase which most of them had only heard in books, "I will serve drinks while the others speak. I will ask each in turn. Doctor, will you be good enough to wait while the financial secretary speaks?"

"I should think," said the doctor irritably, "that the lad would be wanting to think over his choice. Does he want me to cut him in two, here, tonight, or doesn't he? I should think that would take priority, wouldn't you?"

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the Lord Redlady, "the mister and doctor Wentworth has a very good point indeed. But there is no sense in asking Rod about being cut in two unless he knows why. Mister financial secretary, will you tell us all what happened last night?"

John Fisher stood up. He was so chubby that it did not matter. His brown, suspicious, intelligent eyes looked over the lot of them.

"There are as many kinds of money as there are worlds with people on them. We here on Norstrilia don't carry the tokens around, but in some places they have bits of paper or metal which they use to keep count. We talk our money into the central computers which even out all our transactions for us. Now what would happen if I wanted a pair of shoes?"

Nobody answered. He didn't expect them to.

"I would," he went on, "go to a shop and look in the screen at the shoes which the offworld merchants keep in orbit. I would pick out the shoes I wanted. What's a good price for a pair of shoes in orbit?"

Hopper was getting tired of these rhetorical questions so he answered promptly, "Six bob."

"That's right. Six minicredits."

"But that's orbit money. You're leaving out the tariff," said Hopper.

"Exactly. And what's the tar-

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iff?" asked John Fisher, snapping.

Hopper snapped back, "Two hundred thousand times, what you bloody fools always make it in the Commonwealth council."

"Hopper, can you buy shoes?" said Fisher.

"Of course I can!" The station hand looked belligerent again but the Lord Redlady was filling his glass. He sniffed the aroma, calmed down and said, "All right, what's your point?"

"The point is that the money in orbit is SAD money — S for secure, A for and, D for delivered. That's any kind of good money with backing behind it. Stroon is the best backing there is, but gold is all right. Rare metals, fine manufactures, and so on. That's just the money off the planet, in the hands of the recipient. Now how many times would a ship have to hop to get to Old Earth itself?"

"Fifty or sixty," said Aunt Doris unexpectedly. "Even I know that."

"And how many ships get through?"

"They all do," said she.

"Oh, no," cried several of the men in unison.

"About one ship is lost every sixty or eighty trips, depending on the solar weather, on the skills of the pinlighters and go-captains, on the landing accidents. Did any of you ever see a really old captain?"

"Yes," said Hopper with gloomy humor, "a dead one in his coffin."

"So if you have something you want to get to Earth, you have to pay your share of the costly ships, your share of the go-captain's wages and the fees of his staff, your share of the insurance for their families. Do you know what it could cost to get this chair back to earth?" said Fisher.

"Three hundred times the cost of the chair," said doctor Wentworth.

"Mighty close. It's two hundred and eighty-seven times."

"How do you know so mucking much?" said Bill, speaking up. "And why waste our time with all this crutting glubb?"

"Watch your language, man," said John Fisher. "There are some mucking ladies present. I tell you this because we have to get Rod off to Earth tonight, if he wants to be alive and rich."

"That's what you say!" cried Bill. "Let him go to his house. We can load up on little bombs and hold up against anybody who could get through the Norstrilian defenses. What are we paying these mucking taxes for, if it's not for the likes of you to make sure we're safe? Let's take the boy home. Come along."

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The Lord Redlady leaped to the middle of his own floor. He was no prancing Earthman putting on a show. He was the old Instrumentality itself, surviving with raw weapons and raw brains. In his hand he held a something which none of them could see clearly.

"Murder," he said, "will be done this moment if anybody moves. I will commit it. I will, people. Move, and try me! And if I do commit a murder, I will arrest myself, hold a trial and acquit myself. I have strange powers, people. Don't make me use them. Don't even make me show them." The shimmering thing in his hand disappeared. "Mister and doctor Wentworth, you are under my command, by loan. Other people, you are my guests. Be warned. Don't touch that boy. This is Earth territory, this cabin we're in." He stood a little to one side and looked at them brightly out of his strange Earth eyes.

Hopper deliberately spat on the floor. "I suppose I would be a puddle of mucking glue if I helped old Bill?"

"Something like it," said the Lord Redlady. "Want to try?" The things that were hard to see were now in each of his hands. His eyes darted between Bill and Hopper.

"Shut up, Hopper. We'll take Rod if he tells us to go. But if he doesn't — it crudding well doesn't matter. Eh, mister and owner McBan?"

Rod looked around for his grandfather, dead long ago: then he knew they were looking at him instead. Torn between sleepiness and anxiety he answered.

"I don't want to go now, fellows. Thank you for standing by. Go on, mister secretary, with the foe money and the sad money."

The weapons disappeared from the Lord Redlady's hands.

"I don't like Earth weapons," said Hopper, speaking very loudly and plainly to no one at all, "and I don't like Earth people. They're dirty. There's nothing in them that's good honest crook."

"Have a drink, lads," said the Lord Redlady with a democratic heartiness which was so false that the workwoman, Eleanor, silent all the evening, let out one wild caw of a laugh, like a kookaburra beginning to whoop in a tree. He looked at her sharply, picked up his serving jug, and nodded to the financial secretary, John Fischer, that he should resume speaking.

Fisher was flustered. He obviously did not like this Earth practice of quick threats and weapons indoors. But then Lord Redlady — disgraced and remote from Old Earth as he was

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— was nevertheless the accredited diplomat of the Instrumentality. Even Old North Australia did not push the Instrumentality too far. There were ugly things surmised about worlds which had done so.

Soberly and huffily he went on.

"There's not much to it. If the money is discounted thirty-three and one third per cent per trip, and if it is fifty-five trips to get to Old Earth, it takes a heap of money to pay up in orbit right here before you have a minicredit on earth. Sometimes the odds are better. Your Commonwealth government waits for months and years to get a really favorable rate of exchange. And of course we send our freight by armed sailships, which don't go below the surface of space at all. They just take hundreds or thousands of years to get there, while our cruisers dart in and out around them, just to make sure that nobody robs them in transit. There are things about Norstrilian robots which none of you know, and which not even the Instrumentality knows."

He darted a quick look at the Lord Redlady, who said nothing to this, and went on. "It is well worth while not to muck around with one of our perishing ships. We don't get robbed much. And we have other things that are even worse than Mother Hitton and her littul kittons. But the money and the stroon which finally reaches Old Earth Itself is FOE money. F, O, E. F is for Free, O is for On, E is for Earth. F, O, E — free on Earth. That's the best kind of money there is, right on Old Earth Itself. And Earth has the final exchange computer. Or had it."

"Had it?" said the Lord Redlady.

"It broke down last night. Rod broke it. Overload."

"Impossible!" cried Redlady. "I'll check."

He went to the wall, pulled down a desk. A console, incredibly miniature, gleamed out at them. In less than three seconds it glowed. Redlady spoke into it, his voice as clear and cold as the ice they had all heard about:

"Priority. Instrumentality. Short of War. Instant. Instant. Redlady calling. Earthport."

"Confirmed," said a Norstrilian voice, "confirmed and charged."

"Earthport," said the console in a whistling whisper which filled the room.

"Redlady instrumentality official centputer allrightquestion cargo approved question out."

"Cenputer allright cargo approved out," said the whisper.

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The people in the room had seen an immense fortune squandered. Even by Norstrilian standards, the faster-than-light messages were things which a family might not use twice in a thousand years. They looked at Redlady as though he were an evil-worker with strange powers. Earth's prompt answer to the skinny man made them all remember that though Old North Australia produced the wealth, Earth still distributed much of it — and that the super-government of the Instrumentality reached into far places where no Norstrilian would even wish to venture.

The Lord Redlady spoke mildly, "The central computer seems to be going again, if your government wishes to consult it. The 'cargo' is this boy here."

"You've told Earth about me?" said Rod.

"Why not? We want to get you there alive."

"But message security —?" said the doctor.

"I have references which no outside mind will know," said the Lord Redlady. "Finish up, mister financial secretary. Tell the young man what he has on Earth."

"Your computer outcomputed the government," said John Fisher-to-the-hundredth, "and it mortgaged all your lands, all your sheep, all your trading rights, all your family treasures, the right to the MacArthur name, the right to the McBan name and itself. Then it bought futures. Of course, *it* didn't do it. You did, Rod McBan."

Startled into full awakeness, Rod found his right hand up at his mouth, so surprised was he. "I did?"

"Then you bought futures in stroon, but you offered them for sale. You held back the sales, shifting titles and changing prices, so that not even the central computer knew what you were doing. You bought almost all of the eighth year from now, most of the seventh year from now, and some of the sixth. You mortgaged each purchase as you went along, in order to buy more. Then you suddenly tore the market wide open by offering fantastic bargains, trading the six-year rights for seventh-year and eighth-year. Your computer made such lavish use of Instant Messages to Earth that the Commonwealth defense office had people buzzing around in the middle of the night. By the time they figured out what might happen, it had happened. You registered a monopoly of two year's export, far beyond the predicted amount. The government rushed for a weather recomputation, but while they

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were doing that you were registering your holdings on Earth and re-mortgaging them in FOE money. With the FOE money you began to buy up all the imports around Old North Australia, and when the government finally declared an emergency, you had secured final title to one and a half stroon years and to more megacredits, FOE money megacredits, than the Earth computers could handle. You're the richest man that ever was. Or ever will be. We changed all the rules this morning and I myself signed a new treaty with the Earth authorities, ratified by the Instrumentality. Meanwhile, you're the richest of the rich men who ever lived on this world. And you're also rich enough to buy all of Old Earth. In fact, you have put in a reservation to buy it, unless the Instrumentality outbids you."

"Why should we?" said the Lord Redlady. "Let him have it. We'll watch what he does with the Earth after he buys it. If it is something bad, we will kill him."

"You'd kill me, Lord Redlady?" said Rod. "I thought you were saving me?"

"Both," said the doctor, standing up. "The Commonwealth government has not tried to take your property away from you, though they have their doubts as to what you will do with Earth if you do buy it. They are not going to let you stay on this planet and endanger it by being the richest kidnap victim who ever lived. Tomorrow they will strip you of your property, unless you want to take a chance on running for it. Earth government is the same way. If you can figure out your own defenses, you can come on in. Of course the police will protect you, but would that be enough? I'm a doctor. And I'm here to ship you out if you want to go."

"And I'm an officer of government, and I will arrest you if you do not go," said John Fisher.

"And I represent the Instrumentality, which does not declare its policy to anyone, least of all to outsiders. But it is my personal policy," said the Lord Redlady, holding out his hands and twisting his thumbs in a meaningless, grotesque, but somehow very threatening way, "to see that this boy gets a safe trip to Earth and a fair deal when he comes back here!"

"You'll protect him all the way!" cried Lavinia, looking very happy.

"All the way. As far as I can. As long as I live."

"That's pretty long," muttered Hopper, "conceited little pommy cockahoop!"

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"Watch your language, Hopper," said the Lord Redlady. "Rod?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Your answer?" The Lord Redlady was peremptory.

"I'm going," said Rod.

"What on Earth do you want?" said the Lord Redlady ceremoniously.

"A genuine Cape triangle."

"A what?" cried the Lord Redlady.

"A Cape triangle. A postage stamp."

"What's postage?" said the Lord Redlady, really puzzled.

"Payments on messages."

"But you do that with thumbprints or eyeprints!"

"No," said Rod, "I mean paper ones."

"Paper messages?" said the Lord Redlady, looking as though someone had mentioned grass battleships, hairless sheep, solid cast-iron women, or something else equally improbable. "Paper messages?" he repeated, and then he laughed, quite charmingly. "Oh!" he said, with a tone of secret discovery. "You mean antiquities . . . ?"

"Of course," said Rod. "Even before Space itself."

"Earth has a lot of antiquities, and I am sure you will be welcome to study them or to collect them. That will be perfectly all right Just don't do any of the wrong things, or you will be in real trouble."

"What are the wrong things?" said Rod.

"Buying real people, or trying to. Shipping religion from one planet to another. Smuggling underpeople."

"What's religion?" said Rod.

"Later, later," said the Lord Redlady. "You'll learn everything later. Doctor, you take over."

Wentworth stood very carefully so that his head did not touch the ceiling. He had to bend his neck a little. "We have two boxes, Rod."

When he spoke, the door whirred in its tracks and showed them a small room beyond. There was a large box, like a coffin, and a very small box, like the kind that women have around the house to keep a single party-going bonnet in.

"There will be criminals, and wild governments, and conspirators, and adventurers, and just plain good people gone wrong at the thought of your wealth. There will be all these waiting for you to kidnap you or rob or even kill you—"

"Why kill me?"

"To impersonate you and to try to get your money," said the doctor. "Now look. This is your big choice. If you take the big box,

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we can put you in a sail-ship convoy and you will get there in several hundred or thousand years. But you will get there, ninety-nine point ninety-nine per cent. Or we can send the big box on the regular planoforming ships, and somebody will steal you. Or we scun you down and put you in the little box."

"*That* little box?" cried Rod.

"Scunned. You've scunned sheep, haven't you?"

"I've heard of it. But a man, no! Dehydrate my body, pickle my head, and freeze the whole mucking mess?" cried Rod.

"That's it. Too bloody right!" cried the doctor cheerfully. "That'll give you a real chance of getting there alive."

"But who'll put me together. I'd need my own doctor — ?" His voice quavered at the unnaturalness of the risk, not at the mere chanciness and danger of it.

"Here," said the Lord Redlady, "is your doctor, already trained."

"I am at your service," said the little Earth-animal, the "monkey," with a small bow to the assembled company. "My name is A'gentur and I have been conditioned as a physician, a surgeon and a barber."

The women had gasped. Hopper and Bill stared at the little animal in horror.

"You're an underperson!" yelled Hopper. "We've never let the crutting things loose on Norstrilia."

"I'm not an underperson. I'm an animal. Conditioned to—" The monkey jumped. Hopper's heavy knife twanged like a musical instrument as it clung to the softer steel of the wall. Harper's other hand held a long thin knife, ready to reach Redlady's heart.

The left hand of the Lord Redlady flashed straight forward. Something in his hand glowed silently terribly. There was a hiss in the air.

XIV

Where Hopper had been, a cloud of oily thick smoke, stinking of burning meat, coiled slowly toward the ventilators. Hopper's clothing and personal belongings, including one false tooth, lay on the chair in which he had been sitting. They were undamaged. His drink stood on the floor beside the chair, forever to remain unfinished.

The doctor's eyes gleamed as he stared strangely at Redlady: "Noted and reported to the Old North Australian Navy."

"I'll report it too," said the Lord Redlady, "as the use of illegal weapons on diplomatic grounds."

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"Never mind," said John Fisher-to-the-hundredth, not angry at all, but just pale and looking a little ill. Violence did not frighten him, but decision did. "Let's get on with it. Which box, big or little, boy?"

The workwoman Eleanor stood up. She had said nothing but now she dominated the scene. "Take him in there, girls," she said, "and wash him like you would for the Garden of Death. I'll wash myself in there. You see," she added, "I've always wanted to see the blue skies of earth, and wanted to swim in a house that ran around on the big big waters. I'll take your big box, Rod. If I get through alive, you will owe me some treats on earth. You take the little box, Roddy, take the little box and that little tiny doctor with the fur on him. Rod, I trust him."

Rod stood up.

Everybody was looking at him and at Eleanor.

Said the Lord Redlady, "You agree to be scunned and put in the little box for instant shipment to Earth?"

He nodded.

"You will pay all the extra expense?"

He nodded again.

The doctor said, "You authorize me to cut you up and reduce you down, in the hope that you may be reconstituted on Earth?"

Rod nodded to him, too.

"Shaking your head isn't enough," said the doctor. "You have to agree for the record."

"I agree," said Rod quietly.

Aunt Doris and Lavinia came forward to lead him into the dressing room and shower room. Just as they reached for his arms, the doctor patted Rod on the back with a quick strange motion. Rod jumped a little.

"Deep hypnotic," said the doctor. "You can manage his body all right, but the next words he utters will be said, luck willing, on Old Earth Itself."

The women were wide-eyed but they led Rod forward to be cleaned for the operations and the voyage.

The doctor turned to the Lord Redlady and to John Fisher, the financial secretary.

"A good night's work," he said. "Pity about that man, though."

Bill sat still, frozen with grief in his chair, staring at Hopper's empty clothing in the chair next to him.

The console tinkled, "Twelve hours, Greenwich mean time. No adverse weather reports from the channel coast or from Meeya Meefla or Earthport building. All's well!"

The Lord Redlady served drinks to the misters. He did not

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even offer one to Bill. It would have been no use, at this point.

From beyond the door, where they were cleaning the body, clothes and hair of the deeply hypnotized Rod, Lavinia and Aunt Doris unconsciously reverted to the ceremony of the Garden of Death and lifted their voices in a sort of plainsong chant:

Out in the Garden of Death, our young
Have tasted the valiant taste of fear.
With muscular arm and reckless tongue,
They have won, and lost, and escaped us here!

The three men listened for a few moments, attentively. From the other washroom there came the sounds of the workwoman Eleanor, washing herself, alone and unattended, for a long voyage and a possible death.

The Lord Redlady heaved a sigh. "Have a drink, Bill. Hopper brought it on himself."

Bill refused to speak to them but he held forth his glass.

The Lord Redlady filled that and the others. He turned to John Fisher to-the-hundreth and said, "You're shipping him?"

"Who?"

"The boy."

"I thought so."

"Better not," said the Lord Redlady.

"You mean—danger?"

"That's only half the word for it," said the Lord Redlady. "You can't possibly plan to offload him at Earthport. Put him into a good medical station. There's an old one, still good, on Mars, if they haven't closed it down. I know Earth. Half the people of Earth will be waiting to greet him and the other half will be waiting to rob him."

"You represent the Earth government, sir and commissioner," said John Fisher. "That's a rum way to talk about your own people."

"They're not that way all the time," laughed Redlady. "Just when they're in heat. Sex hasn't a chance to compare with money when it comes to the human race on earth. They all think that they want power and freedom and six other impossible things. I'm not speaking for the Earth government when I say this. Just for myself."

"If we don't ship him, who will?" demanded Fisher.

"The Instrumentality."

"The Instrumentality? You don't conduct commerce. How can you?"

"We don't conduct commerce, but we do meet emergencies. I can flag down a long-jump cruiser and he'll be there months before anybody expects him."

"Those are warships. You can't use one for passengers!"

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"Can't I?" said the Lord Redlady, with a smile.

"The Instrumentality would — ?" said Fisher, with a puzzled smile. "The cost would be tremendous. How will you pay for it? It'd be hard to justify."

"*He* will pay for it. Special donation from him for special service. One megacredit for the trip."

The financial secretary whistled. "That's a fearful price for a single trip. You'd want SAD money and not surface money, I suppose?"

"No. FOE money."

"Hot buttered moonbeams, man! That's a thousand times the most expensive trip that any person has ever had."

The big doctor had been listening to the two of them. "Mister and owner Fisher," he said, "I recommend it."

"You?" cried John Fisher angrily. "You're a Norstrilian and you want to rob this poor boy?"

"Poor boy?" snorted the doctor. "It's not that. The trip's no good if he's not alive. Our friend here is extravagant but his ideas are sound. I suggest one amendment."

"What's that?" said the Lord Redlady quickly.

"One and a half megacredits for the round trip. If he is well and alive and with the same personality, apart from natural cause. But note this. One kilocredit only if you deliver him on Earth dead."

John Fisher rubbed his chin. His suspicious eyes looked down at Redlady, who had taken a seat, and up at the doctor, whose head was still bumping the ceiling.

A voice behind him spoke.

"Take it, mister financial secretary. The boy won't use money if he's dead. You can't fight the Instrumentality, you can't be reasonable with the Instrumentality, and you can't buy the Instrumentality. With what they've been taking off us all these thousands of years, they've got more stroon than we do, hidden away somewhere. You, there!" said he rudely to the Lord Redlady. "Do you have any idea what the Instrumentality is worth?"

The Lord Redlady creased his brow. "Never thought of it. I suppose it must have a limit, but I never thought of it. We do have accountants, though."

"See," said Bill. "Even the Instrumentality would hate to lose money. Take the doctor's bid, Redlady. Take him up on it, Fisher." His use of their surnames was an extreme incivility, but the two men were convinced.

"I'll do it," said Redlady. "It's

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awfully close to writing insurance, which we are not chartered to do. I'll write it in as his emergency clause."

"I'll take it," said John Fisher. "It'll be thousands of years until another Norstrilian financial secretary pays money for a ticket like this, but it's worth it. To him. I'll square it in his accounts to our planet."

"I'll witness it," said the doctor.

"No, you won't," said Bill savagely. "The boy has one friend here. That's me. Let me do it."

They stared at him, all three. He stared back.

He broke. "Sirs and misters, please let me be the witness."

The Lord Redlady nodded and opened the console. He and John Fisher spoke the contract into it. At the end Bill shouted his full name as witness.

The two women brought Rod McBan, mother-naked, into the room. He was immaculately clean and he stared ahead as though he were in an endless dream.

"That's the operating room," said the Lord Redlady. "I'll spray us all with antiseptic if you don't mind."

"Of course," said the doctor.

"You're going to cut him up and boil him down — here and now?" cried Aunt Doris.

"Here and now," said the Lord Redlady, "if the doctor approves. The sooner he goes, the better chance he has of coming through the whole thing alive."

"I consent," said the doctor. "I approve."

He started to take Rod by the hand, leading him toward the room with the long coffin and the small box. At some sign from Redlady, the walls had opened up to show a complete surgical theater.

"Wait a moment," said the Lord Redlady. "Take your colleague."

"Colleague?" saidthe giant.

"A'gentur," said Redlady. "It'll be he who puts Rod together again."

"Of course," said the doctor.

The monkey had jumped out of his basket when he heard his name mentioned.

Together, the giant and the monkey led Rod into the little gleaming room. They closed the door behind them.

The ones who were left behind sat down nervously.

"Mister and owner Redlady," said Bill, "since I'm staying, could I have some more of that drink?"

"Of course, sir and mister," said the Lord Redlady, not having any idea of what Bill's title might be.

There were no screams from

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Rod, no thuds, no protest. There was the cloying sweet horror of unknown medicines creeping through the airvents. The two women said nothing as the group of people sat around. Eleanor, wrapped in an enormous towel, came and sat with them. In the second hour of the operations on Rod, Lavinia began sobbing.

She couldn't help it.

That very night it happened. They scunned him; they reduced him; they froze him; they dehydrated him.

The Lord Redlady arranged a relay with the special courier ship which would run him to Earth itself.

These things were supposed to be secret, but they could not be kept completely secret. We all know that no communications systems are wholly leak-proof. Even inside the vast networks of the Instrumentality, shielded, coded and protected though they were, there were soft electronic spots, weak administrative points, or garrulous men here and there. The old computer had not allowed for ordinary human wickedness. It understood the human rules, but not the temptations to break the rules. All the messages concerning Rod's vast speculations had been sent in the clear. It was no wonder that on many worlds, people saw Rod as a chance, an opportunity, a victim, a benefactor, or an enemy.

We all know the old rhyme:

Luck is hot and people funny.
Everybody's fond of money.
Lost a chance and sell your mother.
Win the pot and buy another.
Other people fall and crash:
You could win the pot of cash!

It applied in this case, too. People ran hot and cold with the news.

On Earth, Commissioner Teadrinker wondered if he dared kidnap this rich man who was coming and hold him to ransom. It was illegal, but Teadrinker was so old that he had outlived mere legality.

At Viola Siderea, the Council of Thieves sent the Chief of Thieves in pursuit, spending hard-stolen money on honest lease of patrol ships, so great was their urgency.

At the heart of the underpeople world, an unknown magister invoked the seven logoi and the three Nameless Ones, hoping that the stranger might bring great tidings.

The Commonwealth Council of Old North Australia sat on the matter and decided to send along a full dozen McBan impersonations, just to throw robbers and interceptors off the track. They did not do this be-

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cause they loved Rod, or because they had special regard for him as an individual citizen, but because it was against their principles to let any Old North Australian to be robbed with impunity.

And Rod—

Rod woke on Mars, already reconstituted.

XV

Rod woke with a strange feeling of well-being. In a corner of his mind there were memories of pandemonium — knives, blood, medicine, a monkey working as surgeon. Rum dreams! He glanced around and immediately tried to jump out of bed.

The whole world was on fire!

Bright blazing intolerable fire, like a blowtorch.

But the bed held him. He realized that a loose comfortable jacket ended in tapes and that the tapes were anchored in some way to the bed.

"Eleanor!" he shouted. "Come here!"

He remembered the mad bird attacking him, Lavinia transporting him to the cabin of the sharp Earthman, Lord Redlady. He remembered medicines and fuss. But this — what was this?

When the door opened, more of the intolerable light poured in. It was as though every cloud had been stripped from the sky of Old North Australia, leaving only the blazing heavens and the fiery sun. There were people who had seen that happen, when the weather machines occasionally broke down and let a hurricane cut a hole in the clouds, but it had certainly not happened in his time, or in his grandfather's time.

The man who entered was pleasant, but he was no Norstrilian. His shoulders were slight. He did not look as though he could lift a cow, and his face had been washed so long and so steadily that it looked like a baby's face.He had an odd medical-looking suit on, all white, and his face combined the smile and the ready professional sympathy of a good physician.

"We're feeling better, I see," said he.

"Where on earth am I?" asked Rod. "In a satellite? It feels odd."

"You're not on Earth, man."

"I know I'm not. I've never been there. Where's this place?"

"Mars. The Old Star Station. I'm Jeanjacques Vomact." Rod mumbled the name so badly that the other man had to spell it out for him. When that was straightened out, Rod came back to the subject.

"Where's Mars? Can you un-

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tie me? When's that light going to go off?"

"I'll untie you right now," said Doctor Vomact, "but stay in bed and take it easy until we've given you some food and taken some tests. The light — that's sunshine. I'd say it's about seven hours, local time, before it goes off. This is late morning. Don't you know what Mars is? It's a planet."

"New Mars, you mean," said Rod proudly, "the one with the enormous shops and the zoological gardens."

"The only shops we have here are the cafeteria and the PX. New Mars? I've heard of that place somewhere. It does have big shops and some kind of an animal show. Elephants you can hold in your hand. This isn't that place at all. Wait a sec, I'll roll your bed to the window."

Rod looked eagerly out of the window. It was frightening. A naked, dark sky did not have a cloud in sight. A few holes showed in it here and there. They almost looked like the "stars" which people saw when they were in spaceship transit from one cloudy planet to another. Dominating everything was a single explosive horrible light, which hung high and steady in the sky without ever going off. He found himself cringing for the explosion, but he could tell, from the posture of the doctor next to him, that the doctor was not in the least afraid of that chronic hydrogen bomb, whatever it might turn out to be. Keeping his voice level and trying not to sound like a boy he said, "What's that?"

"The sun."

Don't cook my book, mate! Give me the straight truth. Everybody calls his star a sun. What's this one?"

"The sun. The original sun. The sun of Old Earth Itself. Just as this is plain Mars. Not even Old Mars. Certainly not New Mars. This is Earth's neighbor."

"That thing never goes off, goes up — boom! — or goes down?"

"The sun, you mean?" said Doctor Vomact. "No, I should think not. I suppose it looked that way to your ancestors and mine half a million years ago, when we were all running around naked on Earth." The doctor busied himself as he talked. He chopped the air with a strange-looking little key, and the tapes fell loose. The mittens dropped off Rod's hands. Rod looked at his own hands in the intense light and saw that they seemed strange. They looked smooth and naked and clean, like the doctor's own hands. Weird memories began to come

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back to him, but his handicap about spieking and hiering telepathically had made him cautious and sensitive, so he did not give himself away.

"If this is old, old Mars, what are you doing, talking the Old North Australian language to me? I thought my people were the only ones in the universe who still spoke Ancient Inglish." He shifted proudly but clumsily over to the Old Common Tongue: "You see, the Appointed Ones of my family taught me this language as well. I've never been offworld before."

"I speak your language," said the doctor, "because I learned it. I learned it because you paid me, very generously, to learn it. In the months that we have been reassembling you, it's come in handy. We just let down the portal of memory and identity today, but I've talked to you for hundreds of hours already."

Rod tried to speak.

He couldn't utter a word. His throat was dry and he was afraid that he might throw up.

The doctor put a friendly hand on his arm. "Easy, mister and owner McBan, easy now. We all do that when we *come out.*"

Rod croaked, "*I've been dead.* Dead. Me?"

"Not exactly dead," said the doctor, "but close to it."

"The box — that little box!" cried Rod.

"What little box?"

"Please, doctor — the one I came in?"

"That box wasn't so little," said Doctor Vomact. He squared his hands in the air and made a shape about the size of the little ladies' bonnet-box which Rod had seen in the Lord Redlady's private operating room. "It was this big. Your head was full natural size. That's why it's been so easy and so successful to bring you back to normality in such a hurry."

"And Eleanor?"

"Your companion? She made it, too. Nobody intercepted the ship."

"You mean the rest is true, too? I'm still the richest man in the universe? And I'm gone, gone from home?" Rod would have liked to beat the bedspread, but did not.

"I am glad," said Doctor Vomact, "to see you express so much feeling about your situation. You showed a great deal when you were under the sedatives and hypnotics, but I was beginning to wonder how we could help you realize your true position when you came back, as you now have, to normal life. Forgive me for talking this way. I sound like a medical journal. It's hard to be friends with a

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patient, even when one really likes him."

Friends they became in the ensuing days. After several weeks, Vomact came to the plans he had — when Rod was well enough — for the disguise for a trip to Earth.

"What are you going to do to me, sir and doctor?" asked Rod.

"Anything you want," said Vomact lightly.

"Really, now. What?"

"Well," said Vomact, "the Lord Redlady sent along a whole cube of suggestions. Keep your personality. Keep your retinal and brain images. Change your appearance. Change your workwoman into a young man who looks just like your description."

"You can't do that to Eleanor. She's a citizen."

"Not here, not on Mars, she isn't. She's your baggage."

"But her legal rights!"

"This is Mars, Rod, but it's Earth territory. Under Earth law. Under the direct control of the Instrumentality. We can do these things all right. The hard thing is this. Would you consent to passing for an underman?"

"I never saw one. How would I know?" said Rod.

"Could you stand the shame of it?"

Rod laughed.

Vomact sighed. "You're funny people, you Norstrilians. I'd rather die than be mistaken for an underman. The disgrace of it, the contempt! But the Lord Redlady said that you could walk into Earth as free as a breeze if we made you pass for a cat-man. I might as well tell you, Rod. Your wife is already here."

Rod stopped walking. "My wife? I have no wife."

"Your cat-wife," said the doctor. "Of course it isn't real marriage. Underpeople aren't allowed to have it. But they have a companionship which looks something like marriage and we sometimes slip and call them husband and wife. The Instrumentality has already sent a cat-girl out to be your 'wife.' She'll travel back to Earth with you from Mars. You'll just be a pair of lucky cats who have been doing dances and acrobatics for the bored station personnel here."

"And Eleanor?"

"I suppose somebody will kill her, thinking it's you. That's what you brought her for, isn't it? Aren't you rich enough?"

"No, no, no!" said Rod. "Nobody is that rich. We have to think of something else."

They spent the entire walk back making new plans which would protect Eleanor and Rod both.

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As they entered the shedport and took off their helmets, Rod said, "This wife of mine, when can I see her?"

"You won't overlook her," said Vomact. "She's as wild as fire and twice as beautiful."

"Does she have a name?"

"Of course she does," said the doctor. "They all do."

"What is it, then?"

"C'mell."

XVI

Rod walked to the edge of the little park. This was utterly unlike any ship he had ever seen or heard about in Norstrilia. There was no noise, no cramping, no sign of weapons — just a pretty little cabin which housed the controls, the Go-Captain, the Pinlighters and the Stop-Captain, and then a stretch of incredible green grass. He had walked on this grass from the dusty ground of Mars. There was a purr and a whisper. A false blue sky, very beautiful, covered him like a canopy.

He felt strange. He had whiskers like a cat, forty centimeters long, growing out of his upper lip, about twelve whiskers to each side. The doctor had colored his eyes with bright green irises. His ears reached up to a point. He looked like a cat-man and he wore the professional clothing of an acrobat; C'mell did too.

He had not gotten over C'mell.

She made every woman in Old North Australia look like a sack of lard. She was lean, limber. smooth, menacing and beautiful; she was soft to the touch, hard in her motions, quick, alert and cuddlesome. Her red hair blazed with the silkiness of animal fire. She spoke with a soprano which tinkled like wild bells.

Her ancestors and ancestresses had been bred to produce the most seductive girl on Earth. The task had succeeded. Even in repose, she was voluptuous. Her wide hips and sharp eyes invited the masculine passions. Her cat-like dangerousness challenged every man whom she met. The true men who looked at her knew that she was a cat, and still could not keep their eyes off her. Human women treated her as though she were something disgraceful. She travelled as an acrobat, but she had already told Rod McBan confidentially that she was by profession a "girly-girl," a female animal, shaped and trained like a person, to serve as hostess to offworld visitors, required by law and custom to invite their love, while promised the penalty of death if she accepted it.

Rod liked her, though he had been painfully shy with her at

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first. There was no side to her, no posh, no swank. Once she got down to business, her incredible body faded partway into the background, though with the sides of his eyes he could never quite forget it. It was her mind, her intelligence, her humor and good humor, which carried them across the hours and days they spent together. He found himself trying to impress her that he was a grown man, only to discover that in the spontaneous, sincere affections of her quick cat-heart, she did not care in the least what his status was. He was simply her partner and they had work to do together. It was his job to stay alive and it was her job to keep him alive.

The doctor Vomact had told him not to speak to the other passengers at all; at the same time, the doctor had asked C'mell to tell the other passengers not to say anything to each other, and to call for silence if any of them spoke.

There were ten other passengers who stared at one-another in uncomfortable amazement. Ten in number, they were. All ten of them were Rod McBan.

Ten identical Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBans to the one hundred and fifty-first, all exactly alike. Apart from C'mell herself and the little monkey-doctor, A'gentur, the only person on the ship who was *not* Rod McBan was Rod McBan himself. He had become the cat-man. The others seemed, each by himself, to be persuaded that he alone was Rod McBan and that the other nine were parodies. They watched each other with a mixture of gloom and suspicion mixed with amusement, just as the real Rod McBan would have done, had he been in their place.

"One of them," said doctor Vomact in parting, "is your companion Eleanor from Norstrilia. The other nine are mouse-powered robots. They're all copied from you. Good, eh?" He could not conceal his professional satisfaction.

And now they were all about to see the wonders of Old Earth itself together.

C'mell took Rod to the edge of the little world and said gently, "I want to sing 'The Tower Song' to you, just before we shut down on the top of Earthport." And in her wonderful voice she sang the strange little old song.

Oh, my love, for you!
High birds, crying and a
High sky flying, and a
High heart striving, and a
High wind driving, and a
High brave place — for you!

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Rod felt a little funny, standing there, looking at nothing, but he also felt pleasant with the girl's head against his shoulder and his arm enfolding her. She seemed not only to need him, but to trust him very deeply. She did not feel adult — not self-important and full of unexplained business. She was merely a girl, and for the time *his* girl. It was pleasant. It gave him a strange foretaste of the future.

The day might come when he would have a permanent girl of his own, facing not a day, but life; not a danger, but destiny. He hoped that he could be as relaxed and fond with that future girl as he was with C'mell.

C'mell squeezed his hand, as though in warning.

He turned to look at her but she stared ahead and nodded with her chin,

She said, "Keep watching straight ahead. Earth."

He looked back at the blank blue artificial sky of the ship's force-field. It was a monotonous but pleasant blue, conveying depths which were not really there.

The change was so fast that he wondered whether he had really seen it.

In one moment the clear flat blue — then the false sky splashed apart as though it had literally been slashed into enormous ribbons, ribbons in their turn becoming blue spots and disappearing.

Another blue sky was there — Earth's.

Manhome.

Rod breathed deeply. It was hard to believe. The sky itself was not so different from the false "sky" which had surrounded the ship on its trip from Mars, but there was an aliveness and wetness to it, unlike any other sky he had ever heard about.

It was not the sight of earth which surprised him — it was the smell. He suddenly realized that Old North Australia must smell dull, flat and dusty to Earthmen. This Earth air smelled alive. There were the odors of plants, of water, of things which he could not even guess. The air was coded with a million years of memory. In this air his people had swum to manhood, before they conquered the stars. The wetness was not the cherished damp of one of his covered canals. It was wild free moisture which came laden with the indications of things living, dying, sprawling, squirming, loving with an abundance which no Norstrilian could understand. No wonder the descriptions of Earth had always seemed fierce and exaggerated! What was

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stroon that men would pay water for it — water, the giver and carrier of life. This *was* his home, not matter how many generations his people had lived in the twisted hells of Paradise VII or the dry treasures of Old North Australia. He took a deep breath, feeling the plasma of earth pour into him, the quick effluvium which had made man. He smelled Earth again. It would take a long lifetime, even with stroon, before a man could understand all these odors which came all the way up to the ship, which hovered, as planoforming ships usually did not, twenty-odd kilometers above the surface of the planet.

There was something strange in this air, something sweet and clear to the nostrils, refreshing to the spirit. One great beautiful odor overrode all the others. What could it be? He sniffed and then said, very clearly, to himself. "Salt!"

C'mell reminded him that he was beside her. "Do you like it, C'rod?"

"Yes, yes, it's better than —" Words failed him. He looked at her. Her eager, pretty, comradely smile made him feel that she was sharing every milligram of his delight. "But why," he asked, "do you waste salt on the air? What good does it do? Is it to clean the ship some way?"

"Ship? We're not on the ship, C'rod. This is the landing roof of Earthport."

He gasped.

No ship? There was not a mountain on Old North Australia more than six kilometers above mean ground level! And these mountains were all smooth, worn, old, folded by immense eons of wind into a gentle blanketing that covered his whole home world.

He looked around.

The platform was about two hundred meters long by one hundred wide.

The ten "Rod McBans" were talking to some men in uniform. Far at the other side a steeple rose into eye-catching height — perhaps a whole half-kilometer. He looked down.

There it was — Old Old Earth.

The treasure of water reached before his very eyes — water by the millions of tons, enough to feed a galaxy of sheep, to wash an infinity of men. The water was broken by a few islands on the far horizon to the right.

"Hesperides," said C'mell, following the direction of his gaze. "They came up from the sea when the Daimoni built this for us. For people, I mean. I shouldn't say 'us' when I mean people."

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He did not notice the correction. He stared at the sea. Little specks were moving in it, very slowly. He pointed at one of them with his finger and asked C'mell:

"Are those wethouses?"

"What did you call them?"

"Houses which are wet. Houses which sit on water. Are those some of them?"

"Ships," she said, not spoiling his fun with a direct contradiction. "Yes, those are ships."

"Ships?" he cried. "You'd never get one of those into space! Why call them ships then?"

Very gently C'mell explained, "People had ships for water before they had ships for space. I think the Old Common Tongue takes the word for space vessel from the things you are looking at."

"I want to see a city," said Rod. "Show me a city."

"It won't look like much from here. We're too high up. Nothing looks like much from the top of Earthport. But I can show you, anyhow. Come over here, dear."

When they walked away from the edge, Rod realized that the little monkey was still with them. "What are you doing here with us?" asked Rod, not unkindly.

The monkey's preposterous little face wrinkled into a knowing smile. The face was the same as it had been before, but the expression was different — more assured, more clear, more purposeful than ever before. There was even humor and cordiality in the monkey's voice. "We animals are waiting for the people to finish their entrance."

We animals? thought Rod. Then he remembered his furry head, his pointed ears, his catwhiskers. No wonder he felt at ease with this girl and she with him.

The ten Rod McBans were walking down a ramp, so that the floor seemed to be swallowing them slowly from the feet

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up. They were walking in single file, so that the head of the leading one seemed to sit bodiless on the floor, while the last one in line had lost nothing more than his feet. It was odd indeed.

Rod looked at C'mell and A'gentur and asked them frankly, "When people have such a wide, wet, beautiful world, all full of life, why should they kill me?"

A'gentur shook his monkey head sadly, as though he knew full well, but found the telling of it inexpressibly wearisome.

C'mell answered, "You are who you are. You hold immense power. Do you know that this tower is yours?"

"Mine!" he cried.

"You've bought it, or somebody bought it for you. Most of that water is yours, too. When you have things that big, people ask you for things. Or they take them from you. Earth is a beautiful place, but I think it is a dangerous place, too, for offworlders like you who are used to just one way of life. You haven't caused all the crime and meanness in the world, but it's been sleeping. And now it wakes up for you."

"Why for me?"

"Because," said A'gentur, "you're the richest person who has ever touched this planet. You own most of it already. Millions of human lives depend on your thoughts and your decisions."

They had reached the opposite side of the top platform. Here, on the land side, the rivers were all leaking badly. Most of the land was covered with steam-clouds, such as they saw on Norstrilia when a covered canal burst out of its covering. These clouds represented incalculable treasures of rain. He saw that they parted at the foot of the tower.

"Weather machines," said C'mell. "The cities are all covered with weather machines. Don't you have weather machines in Old North Australia?"

"Of course we do," said Rod, "but we don't waste water by letting it float around in the open air like that. It's pretty, though. I guess the extravagance of it makes me feel critical. Don't you Earth people have anything better to do with your water than to leave it lying on the ground or having it float over open land?"

"We're not Earth people," said C'mell. "We're underpeople. I'm a cat-person and he's made from apes. Don't call us people. It's not decent."

"Fudge!" said Rod. "I was just asking a question about Earth, not pestering your feelings when —"

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He stopped short.

They all three spun around.

A man faced them — a tall man, clad in formal garments, his face gleaming with intelligence, courage, wisdom and a very special kind of elegance.

XVIII

I am projecting," said he.

"You know me," he said to C'mell.

"My lord Jestocost!"

"You will sleep," he commanded A'gentur, and the little monkey crumpled into a heap of fur on the deck of the tower.

"I *am* the Lord Jestocost, one of the Instrumentality," said the strange man, "and I am going to speak to you at very high speed. It will seem like many minutes, but it will only take seconds. It is necessary for you to know your fate."

"You mean my future?" said Rod McBan. "I thought that you, or somebody else, had it all arranged."

"We can dispose, but we cannot arrange. I have talked to the Lord Redlady. I have plans for you. Perhaps they will work out."

A slight frowning smile crossed the face of the distinguished man. With his left hand he warned C'mell to do nothing. The beautiful cat-girl started to step forward and then obeyed the imperious gesture, stopped, and merely watched.

The Lord Jestocost dropped to one knee. He bowed proudly and freely, with his head held high and his face tilted upward while he stared directly at Rod McBan.

Still kneeling, he said ceremoniously, "Some day, young man, you will understand what you are now seeing. The Lord Jestocost, which is myself, has bowed to no man or woman since the day of his initiation. That was more time ago than I like to remember. But I bow freely to the man who has bought Earth. I offer you my friendship and my help. I offer both of these without mental reservation. Now I stand up and I greet you as my younger comrade."

He stood erect and reached for Rod's hand. Rod shook hands with him, still bewildered.

"Within minutes assassins will be on their way to kill your impersonators. Other people will try to hunt you down for what you have done or for what you are. I am willing for you to save some of your property and all of your life. You will have experiences which you will treasure — if you live through them.

"You have no chance at all without me. I'll correct that. You have one chance in ten

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thousand of coming out alive.

"With me, if you obey me through C'mell, your chances are very good indeed. More than one thousand to one in your favor. You will live—"

"But my money!" Rod spieked wildly without knowing that he did it.

"Your money is on Earth. It *is* Earth," smiled the wise, powerful old official. "It is being taxed at enormous rates. This is your fate, young man. Remember it, and be ready to obey it. When I lift my hand, repeat after me. Do you understand?"

Rod nodded. He was not afraid, exactly, but some unknown core within him had begun to radiate animal terror. He was not afraid of what might happen to himself; he was afraid of the strange, wild fierceness of it all. He had never known that man or boy could be so utterly alone.

The loneliness of the open outback at home was physical. This loneliness had millions of people around him. He felt the past crowding up as though it were alive in its own right. The cat-girl beside him comforted him a little; he had met her through Doctor Vomact; to Vomact he had been sent by Redlady; and Redlady knew his own dear home. The linkage was there, though it was remote.

In front of him there was no linkage at all.

He stood, in his own mind, on a precipice of the present, staring down at the complex inexplicable immensity of Earth's past. This was the place that all people were from. In those oceans they had crawled in the slime; from those salt, rich seas they had climbed to that land far below him; on that land they had changed from animals into men before they had seized the stars. This was home itself, the home of all men, and it could swallow him up.

The word-thoughts came fast out of the Lord Jestocost's mind, directly into his own. It was as though Jestocost had found some way around his impediment and had then disregarded it.

"This is Old Earth Itself, from which you were bred and to which all men return in their thoughts if not in their bodies. This is still the richest of the worlds, though its wealth is measured in treasures and memories, not in stroon.

"Many men have tried to rule this world. A very few have done it for a little while."

Unexpectedly, the Lord Jestocost lifted his right hand. Without knowing why he did it, Rod repeated the last sentence.

"*A very few men have govern-*

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ed the world for a little while."

"The Instrumentality has made that impossible."

The right hand was still in the commanding "up" position, so Red repeated, "*The Instrumentality has made that impossible.*"

"And now you, Rod McBan of Old North Australia, are the first to own it."

The hand was still raised.

"*And now I, Rod McBan, of Old North Australia, am the first to own it.*"

The hand dropped, but the Lord spieked on.

"Go forward, then, with death around you.

"Go forward, then, to your heart's desire.

"Go forward, with the love you will win and lose.

"Go forward, to the world, and to that other world under the world.

"Go forward, to wild adventures and a safe return.

"Be watchful of C'mell. She will be my eyes upon you, my arm around your shoulders, my authority upon your person; but go.

"Go." Up went the hand.

"Go . . ." said Rod.

The Lord vanished.

C'mell plucked at his sleeve. "Your trip is over, my husband. Now we take Earth itself."

Softly and quickly they ran to the steps which went to unimaginable Earth below them.

Rod McBan had come to the fulfilment of his chance and his inheritance.

—CORDWAINER SMITH

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By BRIAN W. ALDISS

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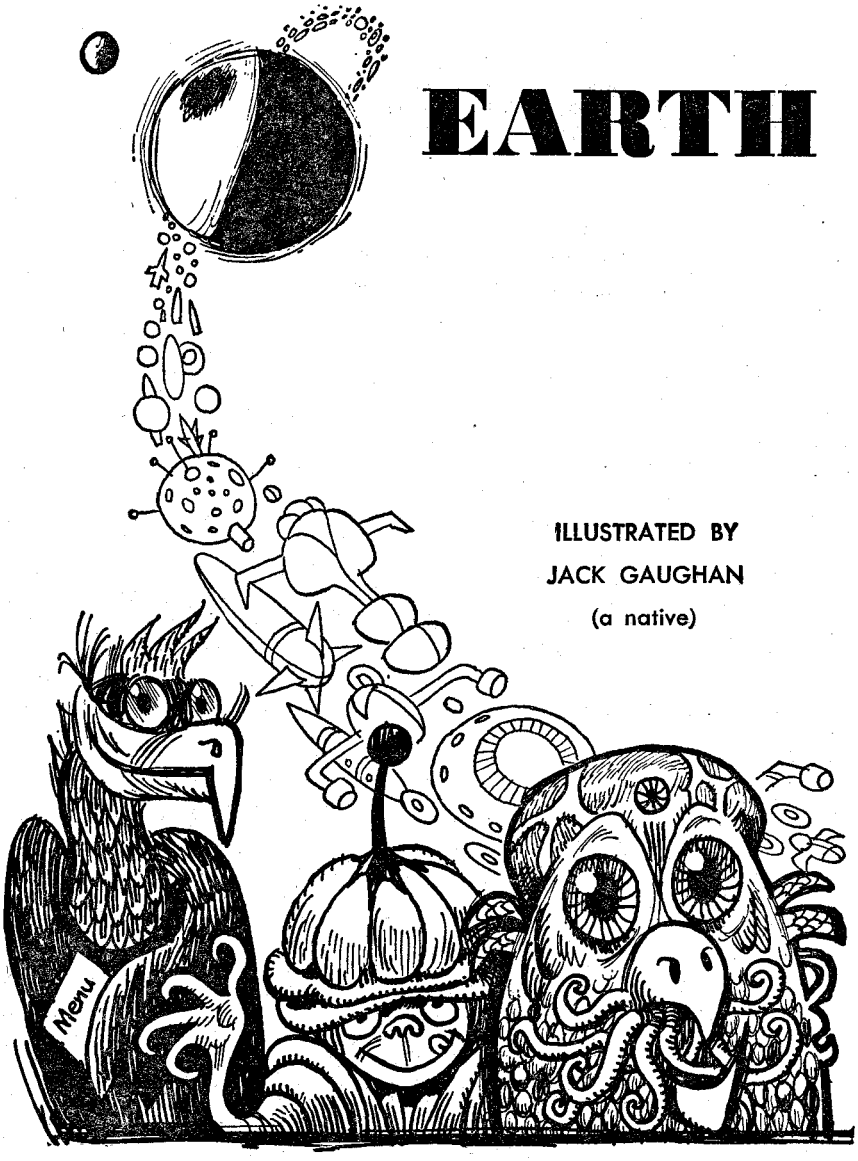
EARTH

ILLUSTRATED BY
JACK GAUGHAN
(a native)



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EIGHTEEN

Looking for somewhere new to travel? Try Earth 18—but beware your fellow tourists.

BY ERNST MASON

This lovely flyway between Los Angeles and Old Nueva York is among the most picturesque of Earth's planetary routes. From East to West one retraces the steps of the early Sodbusters, or Okies, following the vanishing herds of buffalo toward That Great Gold Strike in Hollywood. From West to East one partially follows the path of the Annihilation Eclipse of '99. Rich in historical associations, superb in its natural beauties, Earth Eighteen is justly famed as a pleasant and inexpensive vacation tour for those whose budgets do not permit something better.

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O km, Earth 18 begins at the ancient village of El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles, once the largest (in area) community on this continent and now a settlement of some 1000 human beings administered as a Vegan naval base under the Treaty of Capella XV. At the time of the Occupation of Earth elaborate defense works were constructed by the natives, which, however, failed in their purpose and are now used by the Vegans for training exercises in the demolishment of defense positions. Little now remains of this once mighty system of walls and fortifications, known locally as Freeways. However, even less remains of the people who built them.

A number of side trips are available, which the discerning traveler will avoid.

4 km w., on local route Wilshire Boulevard, the La Brea Tar Pits, app. 10 hectare tract of Pleistocene asphalt beds, part of a sedimentary series of sands, clays and gravel, present thickness estimated at from 10 to 50 meters. In the geologic past these beds comprised open tar seeps, perhaps with a thin film of water as a surface feature, attracting thirsty fauna. These became entrapped in the tar and attracted carnivores to prey on them, which in turn became entrapped and attracted later forms as spectators, chewing-gum vendors and purveyors of picture post cards. Among the species represented in the tar are dire wolves, saber-tooth tigers and mastodons, which are extinct, and dogs, cats and human beings, which are not, quite.

46 km. s.e., on local route JJ, is Disneyland, inhabited by American Indians, early rocket men, cowboys, "bank robbers" and other primitive forms, none of which are alive.

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324 km. Hoover Desert. This great dust bowl, which must be approached with respirators, is an awe-inspiring sight. Named after a mythical early hero (cf. Hooverville, Hoovertown, Hoover Vacuum Cleaner, etc.), the name refers to anything which is shabby or in need of cleaning, hence this massive ruin. More than 500 meters in length and bone dry, it was at one time a mighty reservoir conserving the waters of the Colorado River until residents of the State of Arizona, angered because of what they deemed an unfair division of its waters, crept to the base of the dam one night and left its faucets running.

489 km. Grand Canyon, 360 km long and nearly 30 km in width at some points, has been compared in size and beauty with the Polar Chasm of Aldebaran XVIII, but not, however, by those who have visited Aldebaran XVIII. Along its sharply eroded walls can be seen rock strata going back nearly one billion local years, ranging from pre-Cambrian schists and gneisas Coca-Cola bottle tops and ses, lacking in any fossil remains, through Cambrian, Devonian, Mississippian and Permian layers, to recent deposits rich in archeological finds such burned-out picture tubes.

Exploring the lower portion of the Canyon afoot or atentacle is a pleasant diversion for visitors who do not expect too much. The natives can provide pack animals for those who wish to venture down the old rock trails to the bottom of the chasm, where desert plants like agave and Spanish bayonet flourish. The pack animals are strong, agile and specially bred for this arduous work, but cannot be relied upon for transport of visitors weighing more than 120 kg. For heavier visitors quadrupeds, such as "horses" or "mules", are available.

The lower portion of the Coconino Plateau, forming the south rim of the Canyon, is off-limits to all visitors lacking protective armor or weapons of defense. These areas have been colonized by Lesser Betelgeusan Chameleons which, masked as boulders or tree-stumps, lie in wait for their prey beside the trails.

677 km. Wupatki National Monument. This spot has a rich and fascinating history. Unfortunately none of it is known.

146 km n. on Planetary Route 356 may be seen the sites of the former Navajo Cliff Dwellings, now a flat and featureless desert. Their appearance dates from Local Year

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1985, when an Arizona senator succeeded in having them classified as tenements and demolished as part of an "urban redevelopment program."

At 1088 km the flyway passes s. of Mt. Taylor (3400 meters), a peak of the Rocky Mountain chain. Care must be taken in passing this point, as the snow-capped peak visible to the south is not a mountain but a Greater Betelgeusan Chamelion.

At 1204 km, by bringing your floatcraft above 400 meters you may be fortunate enough to see southward a muddy trickle wending its feeble way along what what was at one time the border between the provinces of Mexico and Usa. Shallow, narrow and seasonally unreliable, this stream was known derisively to the natives as "The Big River" or Rio Grande.

1482 km. The Carlsbad Caverns. At this point the flyway passes over what is almost the last surviving preserve of native life in its pre-Contact form. In this underground empire, more than 60 km of connecting chambers and passages are known to exist, some of which reach a length of nearly a kilometer and a ceiling height of some 85 meters. Formed some 60,000,000 local years ago by water erosion in beds of gypsum and limestone, in 1995 the Caverns were occupied by refugees fearing nuclear holocaust and, sustained by primitive forms of food-synthesizers, water recirculators, etc., they have remained there ever since.

The area has been declared a Galactic Game Refuge, and no visitors are permitted to enter the Caverns except when accompanied by a licensed galactic

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guide and equipped with no-see invisibility shields, sound dampers, etc. Permits may be obtained from the Park Director for the guided tour. Qualified academic or government personnel may secure authorization for unconducted visits, including the privilege of visiting sections of the Caverns not normally included in the tour and the right to take specimens, but this must be arranged in writing in advance.

The Earth colony in the Caverns comprises nearly 1500 adult population and, although the census of recent years has shown some decline in the number of young born each spring, it is expected that it will stabilize at a figure in excess of 1,000. The natives are bellicose and imbued with a mystique they call "Massive Retaliation". Much of their religious activity centers around an annual war dance and role-playing ceremony in which chosen heroes known as the Teller (or Good One) and the Pauling (or Evil One) contend in mock combat to decide whether or not to "Press the Button." By convention the Teller always wins but in a richly symbolic ceremony is prevented from "pressing the button" by a horde of masked assassins in a rite known as "civilian interference with strategic concepts." The "button" may at one time have had some relation to actual weapons, but all such have of course long since been disarmed or removed by Sirian teams of engineers. The homes are principally carved out of the rock, although some attempt has been made to erect huts in the larger chambers, where the tribal life retains

more of its original vitality, the women cooking and caring for the children while the men follow their traditional occupations of cave-bat hunting and television repair.

Of recent years there has been much debate as to the ultimate fate of this colony in the halls of the Protectorate Council, some factions proposing to tell them that the war is over and return them to the surface, the more conservative element advocating retaining them as they are. It is considered likely that the latter view will prevail, at least as long as the planet continues to produce an adequate supply of other protein.

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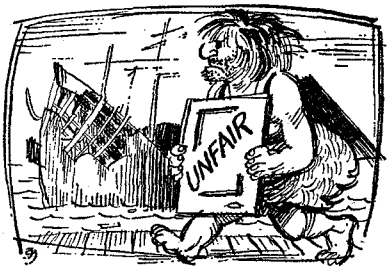
2473 km. Houston, although pleasantly located, is not recommended for more than a short visit because of the unpleasant odor of a native hydrocarbon compound. Once used as fuel, "oil", as it is called, invades the drinking water, the air and the conversation of the locals, who firmly believe it will once again have value and attempt to trade "leases" to travellers in exchange for chocolate bars or bits of colored glass.



2576 km. At Galveston at low tide may be seen the rusting remains of the *Nuclear Ship Savannah,* one of the earliest atomic-powered surface craft built on Earth. Local tradition holds that its engines, driven by "kobalds" or "gobs" under the direction of a legendary figure named Rickover, never needed refueling. Ritual caste differences between "locals" at the time of launching made it impossible to secure a crew and the vessel never put to sea, so indeed they never did.

3132 km. Here the flyway passes over the open sea for a distance of some 1500 km where, just s. of the Mississippi River Delta, is Gulfhaven, a modern resort for aquatic forms, equipped with pressure rooms, steam generators, whirligons, etc. Gulfhaven is unique among Earth Eighteen's tourist attractions in that its administration and financing is 100 per cent Terrestrial controlled, as a Point 99 Project sponsored jointly by groups from Saiph III and the Procyon system after the Occupation of Earth. Actual construction, of course, was accomplished by imported machinery, mostly from Rigel VI. Among the resort's many forms of amusement and sports are swimming, floating, diving, writhing, soaking, flowing and glunt.

The natives are intelligent, cooperative and cultured. They are not to be confused with the biped land form with whom they once contended for the domination of the planet. Aquatic but air-breathing, the Terrestrials of Gulfhaven are known locally as "dolphins."

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4145 km. Amphibian forms may relish a stopover at The Everglades, a tract of some 5,000 square km of swamp, forest, marsh and waterways. Abounding in game of every variety, The Everglades have been described as a hunter's paradise, where limit bags may be taken of bear, otter, deer, white-banded teal, human beings, white and blue herons, panthers, bullfrogs, manatees, brown mallard, duck, roseate spoonbill, alligators, Cape Sable seaside sparrows and snakes. Sea trout, tarpon, channel bass and other marine vertebrates tempt aquatic forms. All in all, The Everglades have considerable local renown as a first-rate place for a picnic for almost any traveller, and their attractions have been enhanced by a vigorous building program on the part of Park authorities, including game areas, hostels and barbecue pits, with native servants to clean away any untidy remnants.

CAUTION:

These human beings may not be taken on your Transient Hunting License. Please cooperate with the Park authorities by bagging only the wild humans for table or trophy, as the trained specimens

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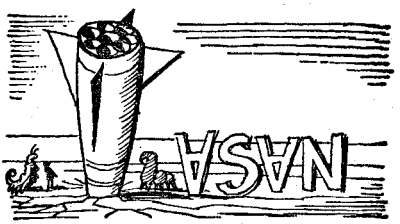
are hard to replace. If you inadvertently take one of them you must report it at once to the Park Director and pay a fair price per kilogram of dressed weight.

4267 km. In Miami Beach simple accommodations may be obtained for a few "pennies" in local currency at establishments such as the Eden Roc or Fontainebleau. Southern Florida is subtropical in climate (273°-288° A.) and displays many lovely flowering plants, none of them native. Those interested in geology will find the eastern coast somewhat elevated over the west as the weight of the Gulf of Mexico depressed the western strata, thus displaying more ancient rock formations on the eastern side. At Bradenton (128 km nnw.) may be seen the rusting remains of the hydraulic jacks built in 1983, when a 9th District "congressman" fought through a large federal appropriation to combat this geological shift and "set the damn thing straight again."

4591 km. Now a National Park, the former site of Cape Canaveral is rich in local historical interest. The people are friendly, provided one purchases souvenirs. The males are tall, wear soft caps and speak a curious local argot. The women do not show themselves in the presence of strangers. An interesting feature of the Canaveral dialect is their unique numbering system, which goes, "Five, four, three, two, one, oh, curse it all!" The most prominent local feature is a pylon of dressed stone 35 meters high, representing a primitive rocket missile and known locally as "the NASA totem" after the initials of the *National-Arbeiter Sozialistische Aktion,* the group which first sponsored rocket research.



Manny's, a beach club, provides box lunches for travelers and a simple dinner on the premises for those who wish to lunch while overlooking the rusted gantries. A local delicacy is smoked salmon, which has a complex religious significance for the natives under its name of "lox."

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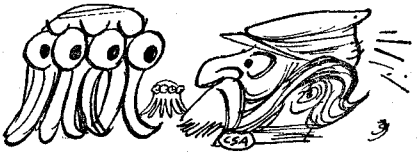
4922 km. Brunswick, Georgia, the site of the first invasion from the sea by Vegan marine forces during the Occupation of Earth, is now noted principally for its series of rolling sand dunes extending n. and s. as far as the eye can reach. Here Vegan amphitanks, advancing from staging areas just off the Continental Shelf, rolled inland in waves of a thousand or more tanks, beaming individual targets with lasers and mortaring tactical nuclear shells in a creeping barrage that preceded them as they advanced. The aboriginal population was wiped out entirely. One Vegan was a casualty, having sprained a fluke in a collision between his amphitank and a landing triphib assault craft. As a sightseeing object Brunswick is something of a disappointment, since there is essentially nothing left to see, but that's a Vegan invasion for you.

A side trip to Atlanta (426 km wnw) will prove of more interest to historically minded visitors. This ghost town, now inhabited by only a few small quadrupeds and great flocks of pigeons, was once considered a major human-being community and had something the status of a regional capital. Modeled after Greek sources—that is to say, with a pleasure-bent aristocracy subsisting on the toil of slaves—it was thus derogatorily referred to as "The Athens of the South." Here the Vegan drive culminated with the burning of the city, an event which is commemorated in the doleful native folk ballad, *Marse Sherman, We Thought You Wuz Dead but You Fooled Us.*



5543 km. Washington. Muggy, miasmic and malarious, the climate of this former provincial capital is such that stopovers are not recommended in the months of May through October or December through March. It is at its best, if best is the right word, in April and November, when it is unpleasant. The men are tall, indolent and gloomy, with bushy eyebrows. The women nag the men. The quaint name of the town comes from the folk belief that at one time this area was inhabited by countless "government workers" who proliferated until their natural increase came to a halt because of the destruction of their grazing grounds. It was said that they survived by the taking in of one another's washing (cf, 9007 Terrestrial *Folk Sayings*, by I. Asenion), hence the description of the place as "washing done."

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Rooms may be had at the White House, but travelers are cautioned to beware of insect pests. In case of real need one may find meals hawked by vendors on Constitution Mall. Avoid Pennsylvania Avenue, where mendicants (the local term is "lobbyists") are present in large numbers, whining, begging and exhibiting maimed limbs and ulcerated sores, termed "depreciation allowances."

This stopover is not recommended.

Visible w. at altitudes over 200 meters is The Pentagon, a ruin whose five sides are said to represent the five branches of the Old American government: the Legislative, the Executive, the Judicial, the Military and the A.M.A. Its outer corridors make a shrouded, mysterious retreat, especially attractive to children. However, it is not wise to penetrate its inner recesses without taking along a native guide, or two if one is especially hungry.

94 km nw, on local route XX-3, is Gettysburg, site of a minor engagement between humans but venerated because named after the legendary general and oil prospector, J. Getty Eisenhoover, who was elected president of the United States in the famous "54.40 percent or fight" campaign—a figure which refers (as above) to depreciation allowances.

5781 km. In Philadelphia an old lamasery contains a cantrip, or Q'ran, which provides a focus for religious observances by the natives. Copperplate-printed in 1776, it purports to be a "declaration of independence" setting forth a program designing to abolish certain iniquities, such as standing armies and "a multitude of new offices, and... swarms of officers [who] harass our people and eat out their substance." It is interesting, if fruitless, to speculate on the consequences if this program had succeeded.

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5946 km. Old Nueva York. This broad bay where the Hudson River meets the Atlantic Ocean is thought to have been the site of a large city at one time. Legends give various reasons for its disappearance. Held to have been "the money center of the world", some theories state that with the abolition of money due to the growth of credit cards, its purpose ceased to exist and it was plowed under in a ritual sacrifice to propitiate evil spirits and bring back "the good old days." (Cf. the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, etc.) An alternate legend tells of a time of building mighty monoliths in ceremonies known in other primitive communities as "potlatching", where one tribe, the RCAs, conspicuously consumed their wealth in erecting a huge structure, to be matched by another tribe, the Pan-Ams, etc. According to this folk-tale the foundations of the island simply could not support its superstructure

and it turned over and disappeared in the sea. A third legend, that the city was obliterated in a nuclear conflict, has been conclusively disproved by phase-analysis methods based on a study of human psychological traits as reconstructed from surviving documents. Clearly they were crazy, but no race could be *that* crazy.

In any event, the site at present comprises a broad, clear bay surrounded by pleasant woods and savannas. As the bay is of deep water and offers shelter for vessels it was once contemplated that a trading center be established there, but the project was given up when it was realized there was nothing on Earth worth trading for.

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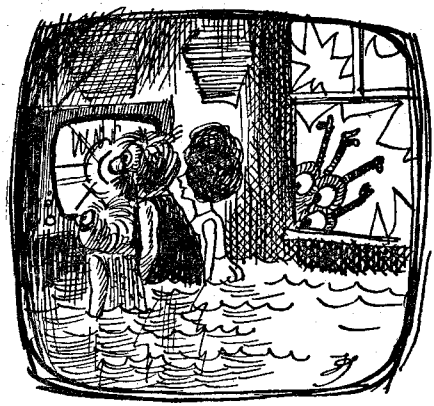
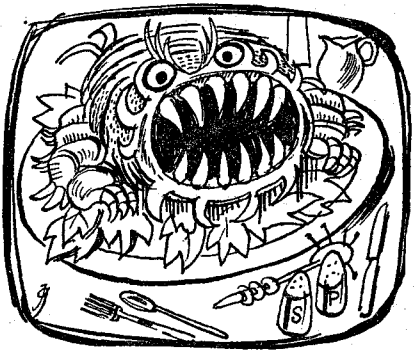
65 km e. on local route Northern State Boulevard is Levittown, a surprisingly well preserved community of humans. Nearly one tenth of the buildings survive, though many are awash at high tide. A few of the structures are of traditional local interest, as the home at the corner



of Alexanderplatz Drive and Les Champs Elysees du Ouest. This building is tabu to the natives, who held that in its early history it was the subject of a shameful violation of folkways, since it was purchased for cash.

At various points s. of Levittown civilized colonies have been established, and meals and lodgings can be obtained. A celebrated old inn is Howard Johnson's Floater Lodge where 43 varieties of accommodations can be obtained, including hi-G, deep freeze and methane. Mjlssss's, celebrated for its Arcturan cuisine, is rewarding for the seasoned traveler seeking a meal that is different. It is not recommended for those traveling with children weighing less than 45 kilograms. Caution must be observed in eating the Arcturan dishes, as they may eat you first.



677 km n.w. on local route Thruway is Niagara Falls, which some travelers consider a scenic wonder comparable to the Jovian Red Spot. Others consider it pretty dull. The waterfall itself is divided into two parts, locally termed the "American" and the "Canadian" falls, over which an aggregate of some 450,000 cubic meters of water pass each minute, descending an average distance of 50 meters. That is all there is to it. It hardly seems enough.

6317 km. Boston, and the terminus of your trip! Here travelers may secure transmatter passage for their return to civilization, not without a hearty sense of gratitude in most cases.

Boston (or, as it is sometimes called, "boss-town") itself is a fishing village of no great distinction although scenically it

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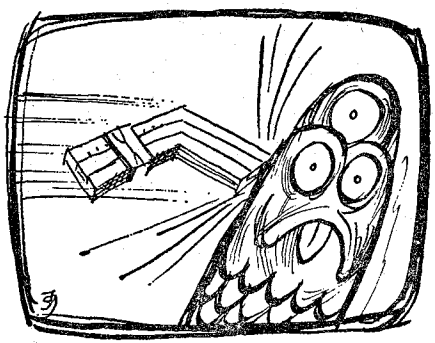
is attractive particularly when approached in darkness. Clinging to a precarious existence under the constant threat of invasion by its more powerful neighbors on the opposite bank of the Charles River, Boston, ringed by watchfires and under martial law from dusk to dawn, is an impressive sight from the air at night.

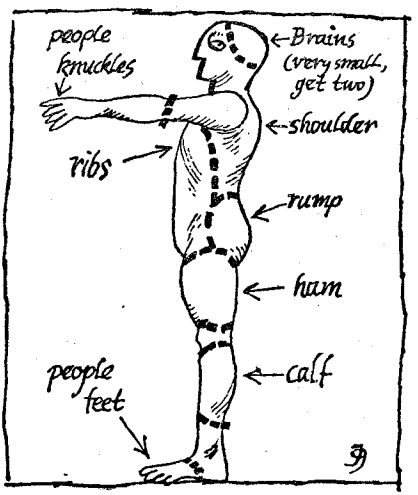


The transfluvian tribes are hostile. Until recent times they eked out their grazing economy by decoying floatcraft into landing in their territory by means of false beacons. Thereupon the travelers would be ambushed, robbed and sometimes killed by the native weapon, a sort of boomerang or "slipstick", which they use with great skill. This, of course, was put a stop to. The present occupants of the trans-Charles territory are new immigrants, their predecessors being now extinct.

87 km e. is Cape Cod, now a missile base occupied by Vegan mermen but once celebrated human vacation resort and historical shrine. On its sandy beaches an invasion of Vikings led by Eric the Red were repulsed by local irregulars under Joe McCarthy, who according to tradition parted the waters with a birch rod and thus stranded the invasion fleet. The spot is marked by a monolith known as Plymouth Rock, or Wreck.

And so we come to an end in your pleasure-jaunt along old Earth Eighteen! On behalf of the various Park directors, the Tourist Agency and those overburdened gamekeepers charged with the care of the surviving humans of this planet, we wish you a safe trip home — and better luck on your next vacation!

ERNST MASON



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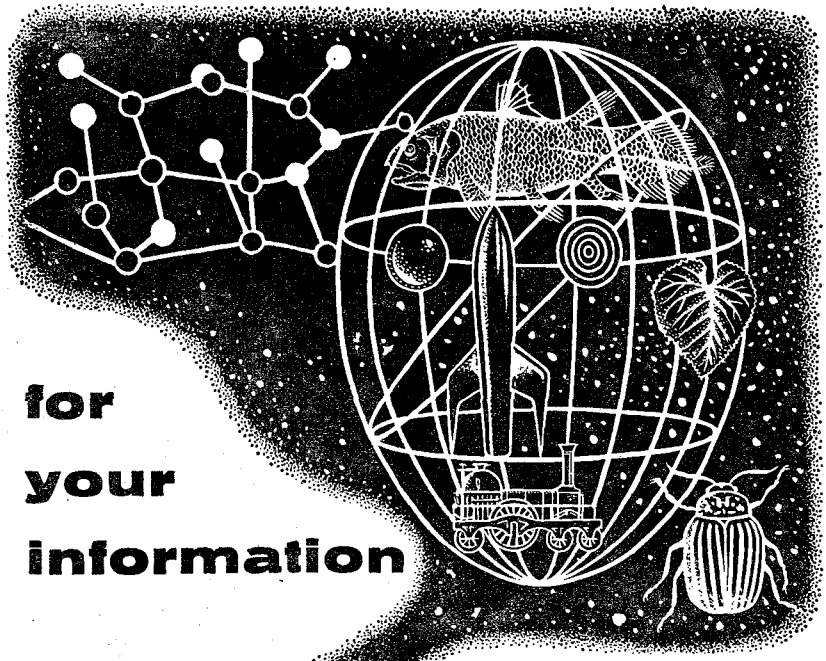
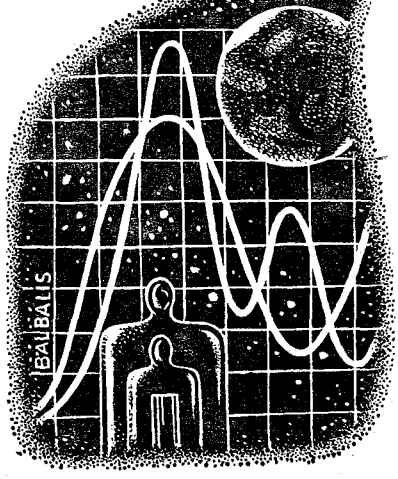


for your information

BY WILLY LEY

GALTON'S RANDOM MACHINE, THE BEAN CURVE AND MILITARY PURCHASES



Sir Francis Galton, who died in 1911 just one month before reaching the age of 89, was one of the important scientists of the latter part of the nineteenth century even though his name is not very well known any more.

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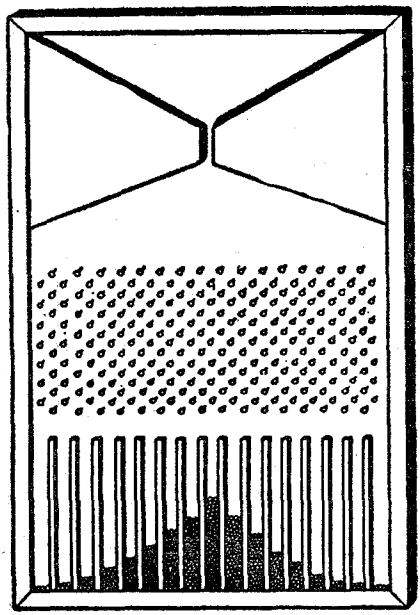
He was born in Birmingham in 1822. By the time little Francis received his first lessons, one of his cousins who was thirteen years older studied for the ministry and passed his spare time as an enthusiastic collector of English beetles. The name of the beetle-collecting cousin was Charles Darwin; the grandfather of them both was Dr. Erasmus Darwin. By the time Charles Darwin went on a voyage around the world on the H.M.S. *Beagle,* instead of mounting the pulpit, Francis Galton was at Trinity College, Cambridge studying anthropology. At the age of 23 he went travelling too, first to the Sudan, then to South-West Africa. After his return he first wrote about his travels and then turned to the study of meteorology. His *Meteorographica* (1863) was one of the first comprehensive books on the then new science of weather research.

That he did not stick to meteorology but changed course once more was the fault of his cousin.

Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* had been published in 1859. Galton read it, of course, and realized that here was a whole collection of new fields and that Darwin, thorough as he had been, had not been able to cover everything. Therefore he began to work in a few of these peripheral fields.



Galton's "Random Machine"

He became especially interested in heredity as applied to humans, and began statistical studies of hereditary traits. His studies involved the results of inheritance in certain families, but also of people who were not related but had something in common — for example genius, or color blindness, or a criminal record. The last subdivision led him to fingerprints, about which he wrote several books.

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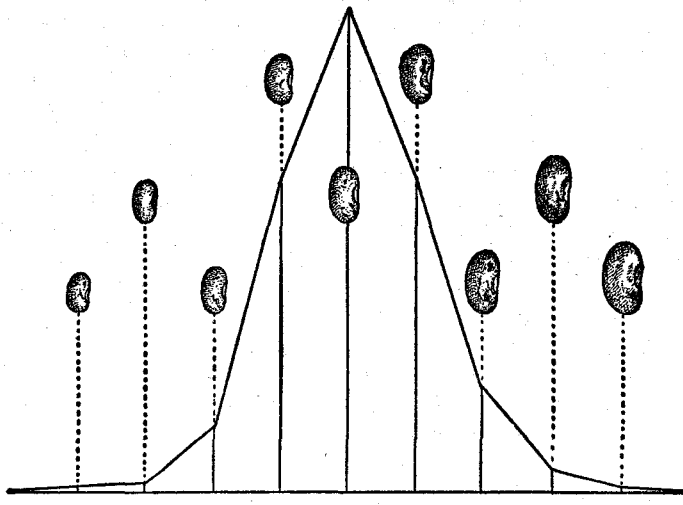

The distribution of 442 beans picked at random. Upper line gives length in millimeters, lower line tht number of beans.

Heredity was understood in Galton's time, to the extent that it had been noticed that both parents passed on traits to their children, and that some traits were pronounced while others seemed to disappear. But it was also known that traits sometimes jumped across one generation. His own famous grandfather and famous grandson, Charles Darwin, were one example. The Mendelssohn family in Berlin was another one, where the (middle) member, the banker Abraham Mendelssohn, remarked that it was tough to be the son and the father of famous men. (His father had been the famous Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, his son was the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.) But the extremes, genius on the one side and idiocy on the other, were rare. The majority was in the middle.

One day Galton constructed, presumably for purposes of demonstration, a device which he called the Random Machine. (See Fig. 1.) It consisted of a funnel-like metal strip, mounted on a board. Below the funnel mouth were a large number of evenly distributed brads, and be-

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low them a number of vertical slots. The front of the whole was covered by a pane of glass. The top was open so that the experimenter could drop small steel balls into the funnel. The steel ball would roll down one of the slopes and then bounce its way through the row of brads. Finally it would end up in one of the slots.

It was impossible to tell in advance in which slot the ball would end up. But if a large number, at least a hundred, balls were used, the center slots would receive more of them, and the final distribution of the balls in the slots would always show a curve, highest in the center, and sloping down on both sides. Nor did it matter whether the balls were fed into the machine one by one in succession, or were thrown in by the handful. The result was always the same.

Thoroughness compels me to record that Galton's device was also used for an unscientific purpose — namely that of some genteel gambling at home. All one had to do was to number the slots and to make bets whether the next ball would end up in slot number 3 or number 7. Or else one could bet that none of the first fifty balls would find its way into slot number 1. One enterprising character, name unknown, manufactured the device and marketed it "for family entertainment" under the name of *Tivoli*.

Now Galton's device worked with identical objects which underwent different events; that is, they had collided with different brads in different positions. This reflected the random events that mix traits (nowadays we would say "genes") in heredity. But then this was extended to objects which were different because the random events of heredity had already happened to them.

A group of German researchers bought a few pounds of dry beans in the farmer's market and spent a few afternoons measuring them. The beans were all of the same botanical species, but some of them were, of course, larger than others.

In this case the largest bean happened to be just twice as long as the smallest. A rack of chemical test tubes was pressed into service as a receiver. It was dubbed the "bean harp", since the row of vertical tubes reminded somebody with musical inclinations and some imagination of the strings of a harp. The largest bean went into test tube number 9, the smallest into test tube number 1; and the overall result of the sorting can be seen in Fig. 2. It was the same kind of curve.

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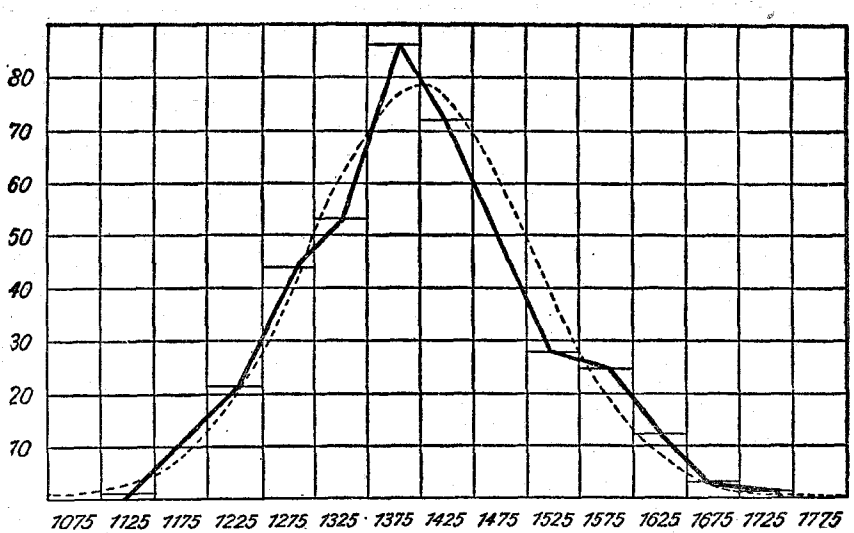

Weight of the brain of 350 Scandinavian males. Vertical column at left gives number of individuals, horizontal column at bottom the weight in grams. Dotted line is the mathematical curve.

The military, especially the Quartermaster Corps, became interested. If beans had such a definite curve showing the average numbers of beans of each size, that might apply to soldiers too — or rather to their uniforms and boots. Of course people differed far more from each other than did beans. Still it could do no harm to let a mathematician play around for some time with statistics of military inventories.

This, it may be necessary to note, was more than a decade before the outbreak of World War I. It may also be added that the mathematicians were disdainful of the biologists' term "bean curve" and at once talked about Gaussian curves.

In the meantime Swedish researchers had extended the bean curve to humans, or the most typically human part of them, namely the brain. In the course of autopsies made for all kinds of reasons the brain weights were noted. The comparison by weight of the brains of 350 Scandinavian males gave the curve in Fig. 3. (If there had been three times as many autopsies the actual curve would have

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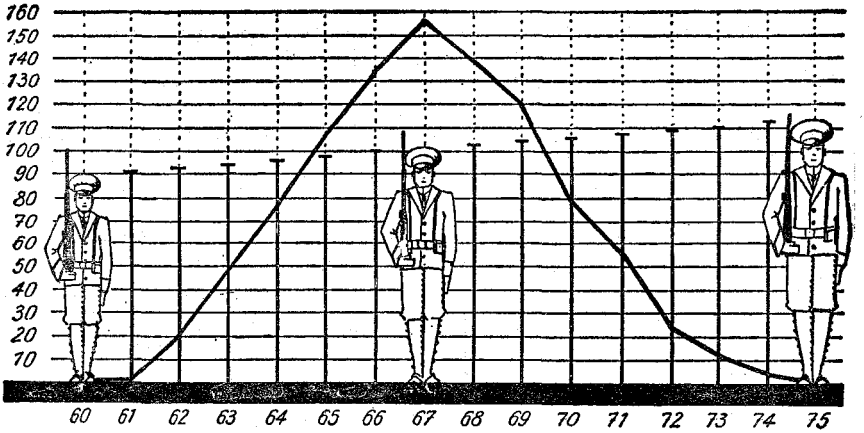

Height of 1000 American soldiers, 1922. Vertical column at left is the number of individuals, horizontal figures at bottom give height in inches.

fitted the theoretical curve bet ter than was the case.)

Some fifty years ago zoologists and biologists were quite happy with the "bean curve" as applied to animals and to certain parts of plants, especially their seeds. The curve was always useful in predicting the probable number of individuals of a certain size in an animal population. To make the curve work, two items had to be established, the more important of them being the location of the center line — that is, the size represented in the largest number of individuals. The less important item is to establish the actual ends of the curve. In the beans first used the largest had been 16 millimeters long, the smallest 8 millimeters. If a million beans had been measured the largest might have been, say, 20 millimeters and the smallest 6 millimeters. But these would be the practical limits. Even ten million beans would not yield one 200 millimeters (about 8 inches) long. They simply do not exist — even though the curve, written as an equation, might say that there should be one 200-millimeter bean in every ten or fifteen million.

Prior to World War I no practical conclusions were based on the bean curve, under whatever name. The reason probably was that private individuals still had their garments made to measure, while the military could set artificial limits and accept as draftees or volunteers only men of arbitrarily set min-

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imum and maximum heights and sizes.

But after the first World War such studies, for the very practical purpose of military purchases of uniforms, underwear, socks and boots, were started. Fig. 4 shows the curve for 1000 American soldiers, a random group picked in 1922. The center line then was 5 feet 7 inches, represented by 157 men. One inch shorter was represented by 136 men and one inch taller by 138 men. The size range from 5 feet 5 inches to 5 feet 10 inches comprised 740 men — very nearly three-quarters of the 1000 soldiers fell into that size range.

It is easy to understand how a knowledge of these facts will influence decisions on military purchases.

Of course, this curve of the year 1922 no longer applies literally. People have grown since then and by now the center line may be 5 feet 8 inches instead of 5 fet 7 inches. Likewise the center line of the curve will vary with nationality. If I had actual statistics I would expect quite different center lines for the British army, the French army and the Japanese army.

But the curve itself would apply in every army, just with a different center line and different cutoff points — which, of course, could be arbitrary.

Of course statistics can go both ways. Actually helmets come in just three sizes, small, medium and large. But if some army wished to issue precisely fitting helmets it could derive its figures from the statistics of the number of different hat sizes purchased by the civilian population. These statistics may be misleading at the extreme ends; men with unusually large heads (like me) usually have so much trouble getting their size that they stop wearing hats except in very bad weather. The result is that the sales statistics do not properly express the distribution of hat sizes.

And when I lived in Washington during the second World War, I heard another story of statistics that miscarried. The Women's Army Corps had been formed and they needed shoes, of course. Purchases were made in accordance with the statistics supplied by manufacturers of women's shoes, and it turned out that they had bought too many small sizes. Because the manufacturer's statistics were, naturally, based on sales volume ... and in this case the sales volumes did *not* reflect the distribution of foot size!

But aside from such comparatively minor exceptions the bean curve is a useful statistical device. — WILLY LEY

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THE END OF THE RACE

It was a triumph of international diplomacy — a triumph over sense!

by ALBERT BERMEL

At that time the nations known as America and Russia had set off 2,500 nuclear explosions, pulverized every small island in the Pacific, Arctic and Indian Oceans, blown out of the earth lumps of great magnitude and little mineralogical value, and saturated the enclosing atmosphere and stratosphere with new elements, from Strontium-90 to Neptunium-237. It was then that the American Secretary of State and the Russian Foreign Minister pointed out to their respective leaders that the "tests," as these detonations were popularly called, had not been successful. "By not successful," the Secretary of State added, "I mean that we have failed to widen the gap."

"By not successful," the Foreign Minister elaborated, "I mean that we have failed to widen the gap."

The leaders of both nations immediately called for a conference and met near a beautiful lake in an intermediate country. Warmed by their consultations with eighty-proof bourbon and one-hundred-ten-proof v o d k a, they agreed that they would neither widen the gap nor narrow it, but simply eliminate gaps once and for all. The Russian leader told the story of a Ukrainian peasant who loved to eat bacon, "but he was so fond of

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his pig that he could not bring himself to kill it. He therefore swapped pigs with his neighbor." The American leader replied: "We must not hesitate to make sacrifices and, as our scientists have repeatedly stated, we must not be afraid to think about the unthinkable."

The conversation continued in this vein for forty-five minutes. As a result, the leaders drew up the outline for a new treaty: they would each drop one medium-sized hydrogen bomb — with a 150-megaton yield—onto the other's home territory, or over it, whichever proved the more convenient. This co-operative action would have two advantages or, as the American leader expressed it, two consumer benefits. Firstly, the impact of the explosions could be tested, not on thin air alone but also on people. Secondly, the two countries would be able to try out their civil defense programs under genuine rather than simulated conditions.

The American leader said, "This ought to deter certain of our citizens from sitting down in Times Square during drill time." The Russian leader answered, "We allow nobody to sit down in Red Square at any time." The two men then shook hands, paid handsome tribute to the country in which they had convened as a bastion of international understanding, issued a cheerful communique which the news services somehow misinterpreted and flew away, the American leader to his yacht, the Russian leader to his dacha.

And it was then that the disagreements began.

Over Aquavita-flavored tea (*en verre*) and highballs a la Philadelphia, the Russian Foreign Minister and the American Secretary of State (with their Ambassadors to the United Nations in attendance) sat for twelve hours at an oval table inlaid with Mollweide's projection of the world in five colors, to implement the details of the treaty by selecting a Russian and an American city as targets. The principal difficulty was that the cities must be equal in population and wealth — although, as the Foreign Minister observed, "We should be prepared to give or take a few citizens in exchange for a few hundred roubles."

There followed a number of fruitless comparisons between San Francisco and Kiev, Nijny-Novgorod and Detroit, Portland (Me.) and Archangel. The four men bent long over the Mollweide projection and eventually arrived at a temporary compromise, London and Warsaw. Then

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they parted for the night and their hotels in order to telephone the respective shores of Florida and the Black Sea.

The next morning they came together again with firm instructions from home to abandon the temporary compromise. Overnight, the Presidential yacht had bidden its second-in-command to "stay within Soviet boundaries — but West of the Urals if humanly possible" and not to "sell America's Polish vote down the Vistula." The Chairman's dacha, on the other hand, had begun his discourse with a folk tale about a canny peasant from the Ukraine who had succeeded in exchanging a sparrow (Warsaw? London?) for a duck (London? Warsaw?), but the duck now had to be fed, whereas the sparrow had been capable of finding its own food and...

On the word "and" the Foreign Minister had fallen asleep with the receiver at his ear. He had awakened thirty-five minutes later, just in time to learn that the destruction of Warsaw would irrevocably lead to uprisings in Prague, Tirana, Sofia, Bucharest and — God help the Red Army—Budapest. The message ended: "Did nobody think of East and West Berlin? Alternatively, the people of the Soviet Union would reluctantly have relinquished Peking for London, except that *Das Kapital* was written in the British Museum, and the People's Democracy of China almost certainly has its own atomic firecrackers and might retaliate."

After reshaping these communications in diplomatic terminology, the Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State again took up their bargaining.

To their surprise, and almost grudgingly, they came to terms within minutes. The American bomb would be dropped over Voronezh which, as the Secretary of State confided to his Ambassador, gave promising possibilities of fallout on Rostov, Dnepropetrovsk, Kursk, Kharkov and Moscow. The Ambassador studied Mollweide and saw that the Secretary was right. For Voronezh and its bonuses, the Secretary of State was more than willing to concede Columbus, Ohio, which, he explained, had long been considered a "test city" in a less conclusive sense by the American advertising community, as well as by several motivational research organizations. So Voronezh-Columbus it was, and in good time for lunch. The two Ambassadors to the United Nations gratefully fastened their briefcases and talked about an afternoon swim in the neighboring lake.

But during the caviar *aux truf-*

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les the Foreign Minister looked thoughtful, and halfway through the *wurst piemontaise* he spoke a vehement *Nyet* and called an afternoon session.

Sadly the Ambassadors reopened their briefcases at two p.m. The Foreign Minister now claimed — although he would not produce census figures to prove it — that the population of Voronezh had swollen considerably under the latest ten-year industrial plan, and that Baltimore would be more nearly equivalent than Columbus.

The Secretary of State could not accept this demand, in view of the proximity of Baltimore to New York. (The American Ambassador was momentarily surprised that his colleague had overlooked Washington, which was much closer). The Secretary then offered, in quick but unsuccessful succession: Atlanta, Little Rock (which the Foreign Minister rejected out of hand), New Orleans and Butte.

The conference thereupon "deadlocked," as most of the press reported. (By means of judicious leaks from two Northern senators and one Russian general, the corps of correspondents had been led to believe that the conference was concerned with the exchange of American alfalfa for Russian millet.)

That evening at a jazz concert in the Russian embassy the Foreign Minister was urged by his counterpart to relent, but in vain. The Secretary of State left early and lay inert on his hotel bed for over an hour, watching the pendulum of a cuckoo clock and wondering whether Baltimore and New York were worth the effort.

Top-secret telephone messages went out that night to Biscayne Bay and the Crimean waters, and were meticulously tapped by two espionage organizations, the KGB and the CIA. The following morning the American and Russian leaders returned almost simultaneously on the same airstrip and paid immediate tribute to their host, this tiny country from which the spirit of international good will irradiated the globe. Within an hour they had displayed the decisiveness for which both were famous, and had settled — that is, undeadlocked — the conference with a new agreement of breathtaking simplicity.

Russia would drop its own bomb on Moscow . . . and America would drop its own bomb on New York City.

Thus, thanks to an astute combination of statesmanship and generosity, the long-feared Third World War never came to pass.

— ALBERT BERMEL

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FINAL ENCOUNTER

BY HARRY HARRISON

ILLUSTRATED BY NODEL

They had searched the galaxy for a fellow species . . . now there was nowhere left to go!

I

Hautamaki had landed the ship on a rubble-covered pan of rock, a scored and ancient lava flow on the wrong side of the glacier. Tjond had thought, but only to herself, that they could have landed nearer; but Hautamaki was shipmaster and made all the decisions. Then again, she could have stayed with the ship. No one had forced her to join in this hideous scramble across the fissured ice. But of course staying behind was out of the question.

There was a radio beacon of some kind over there — on this uninhabited planet — sending out squeals and cracklings on a dozen frequencies. She *had* to be there when they found it.

Gulyas helped her over a dif-

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ficult place and she rewarded him with a quick kiss on his windburned cheek.

It was too much to hope that it could be anything other than a human beacon, though their ship was supposed to be covering an unexplored area. Yet there was the slimmest chance that some *others* might have built the beacon. The thought of not being there at the time of a discovery like that was unbearable. How long had mankind been looking now? For now many time-dimmed centuries?

She had to rest, she was not used to this kind of physical effort. She was roped between the two men and when she stopped they all stopped. Hautamaki halted and looked when he felt her hesitant tug on the rope, staring down at her and saying nothing. His body said it for him, arrogant, tall, heavily muscled, bronzed and nude under the transparent atmosphere suit. He was breathing lightly and normally, and his face never changed expression as he looked at her desperately heaving breast. Hautamaki! What kind of a man are you, Hautamaki, to ignore a woman with such a deadly glance?

For Hautamaki it had been the hardest thing he had ever done. When the two strangers had walked up the extended tongue of the ship's boarding ramp he had felt violated.

This was his ship, his and Kiiskinen's. But Kiiskinen was dead and the child that they had wanted to have was dead. Dead before birth, before conception. Dead because Kiiskinen was gone and Hautamaki would never want a child again. Yet there was still the job to be done; they had completed barely half of their survey swing when the accident had occurred. To return to survey base would have been prodigiously wasteful of fuel and time, so he had called for instructions — and this had been the result. A new survey team, unfledged and raw.

They had been awaiting first assignment — which meant they at least had the training if not the experience. Physically they would do the work that needed to be done. There would be no worry about that. But they were a team, and he was only half a team; and loneliness can be a terrible thing.

He would have welcomed them if Kiiskinen had been there. Now he loathed them.

The man came first, extending his hand. "I'm Gulyas, as you know, and my wife Tjond." He nodded over his shoulder and smiled, the hand still out.

"Welcome aboard my ship,"

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Hautamaki said and clasped his own hands behind his back. If this fool didn't know about the social customs of Men, he was not going to teach him.

"Sorry. I forgot you don't shake hands or touch strangers." Still smiling, Gulyas moved aside to make room for his wife to enter the ship.

"How do you do, shipmaster?" Tjond said. Then her eyes widened and she flushed, as she saw for the first time that he was completely nude.

"I'll show you your quarters," Hautamaki said, turning and walking away, knowing they would follow. A woman! He had seen them before on various planets, even talked with them, but never had he believed that there would some day be one on his ship. How ugly they were, with their swollen bodies! It was no wonder that on the other worlds everyone wore clothes. They needed to conceal the blubbery excess fat.

"Why — he wasn't even wearing *shoes!*" Tjond said indignantly as she closed the door. Gulyas laughed.

"Since when has nudity bothered you? You didn't seem to mind it during our holiday on Hie. And you knew about the Men's customs."

"That was different. Everyone was dressed — or undressed — the same. But this, it's almost indecent!"

"One man's indecency is another's decency."

"I bet you can't say that three times fast."

"Nevertheless it's true. When you come down to it he probably thinks that we're just as socially wrong as you seem to think he is."

"I don't think — I *know!*" she said, reaching up on tiptoes to nip his ear with her tiny teeth, as white and perfectly shaped as rice grains. "How long have we been married?"

"Six days, nineteen hours standard, and some odd minutes."

"Only odd because you haven't kissed me in such a terribly long time."

He smiled down at her tiny, lovely figure, ran his hand over the warm firmness of her hairless skull and down her spare, straight body.

"You're beautiful," he said, then kissed her.

II

Once they were across the glacier the going was easier on the hard-packed snow. Within an hour they had reached the base of the rocky spire. It stretched above them against the green-tinted sky, black and fissured. Tjond let her eyes travel

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up its length and wanted to cry.

"It's too tall! *Impossible* to climb. With the gravsled we could ride up."

"We have discussed this before," Hautamaki said, looking at Gulyas as he always did when he talked to her. "I will bring no radiation sources near the device up there until we determine what it is. Nothing can be learned from our aerial photograph except that it appears to be an untended machine of some kind. I will climb first. You may follow. It is not difficult on this type of rock."

It was not difficult — it was downright impossible. She scrambled and fell and couldn't get a body's-length up the spire. In the end she untied her rope. As soon as the two men had climbed above her she sobbed hopelessly into her hands. Gulyas must have heard her, or he knew how she felt being left out, because he called back down to her.

"I'll drop you a rope as soon as we get to the top, with a loop on the end. Slip your arms through it and I'll pull you up."

She was sure that he wouldn't be able to do it, but still she had to try. The beacon — it might *not* be human made!

The rope cut into her body, and surprisingly enough he could pull her up. She did her best to keep from banging into the cliff and twisting about: then Gulyas was reaching down to help her. Hautamaki was holding the rope... and she knew that it was the strength of those corded arms, not her husband's that had brought her so quickly up.

"Hautamaki, thank you for—"

"We will examine the device now," he said, interrupting her and looking at Gulyas while he spoke. "You will both stay here with my pack. Do not approach unless you are ordered to."

He turned on his heel, and with purposeful stride went to the outcropping where the machine stood. No more than a pace away from it he dropped to one knee, his body hiding most of it from sight, staying during long minutes in this cramped position.

"What is he doing?" Tjond whispered, hugging tight to Gulyas' arm. "What is it? What does he see?"

"Come over here!" Hautamaki said, standing. There was a ring of emotion in his voice that they had never heard before. They ran, skidding on the ice-glazed rock, stopping only at the barrier of his outstretched arm.

"What do you make of it?" Hautamaki asked, never taking his eyes from the squat machine fixed to the rock before them.

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There was a central structure, a half sphere of yellowish metal that clamped tight to the rock, its bottom edge conforming to the irregularities beneath it. From this projected stubby arms of the same material, arranged around the circumference close to the base. On each arm was a shorter length of metal. Each one was shaped differently, but all were pointing skywards like questing fingers. An arm-thick cable emerged from the side of the hemisphere and crawled over to a higher shelf of rock. There it suddenly straightened and stood straight up, rearing into the air above their heads. Gulyas pointed to this.

"I have no idea what the other parts do, but I'll wager that is the antenna that has been sending out the signals we picked up when we entered this system."

"It might be," Hautamaki admitted. "But what about the rest?"

"One of those things that's pointing up towards the sky looks like a little telescope," Tjond said. "I really believe it is."

Hautamaki gave an angry cry and reached for her as she knelt on the ground, but he was too late. She pressed one eye to the bottom of the tube, squinted the other shut and tried to see.

"Why — yes, it is a telescope!" She opened the other eye and examined the sky. "I can see the edge of the clouds up there very clearly."

Gulyas pulled her away, but there was no danger. It was a telescope, as she had said, nothing more. They took turns looking through it. It was Hautamaki who noticed that it was slowly moving.

"In that case — all of the others must be turning too, since they are parallel," Gulyas said, pointing to the metal devices that tipped each arm. One of them had an eyepiece not unlike the telescope's, but when he looked into it there was only darkness. "I can't see a thing through it," he said.

"Perhaps *you* weren't intended to," Hautamaki said, rubbing his jaw while he stared at the strange machine, then turned away to rummage in his pack. He took a multi-radiation tester from its padded carrying case and held it before the eyepiece that Gulyas had been trying to look through. "Infra-red radiation only. Everything else is screened out."

Another of the tube-like things appeared to focus ultra-violet rays, while an open latticework of metal plates concentrated radio waves. It was Tjond who voiced the thought they all had.

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"If I looked through a telescope — perhaps all these other things are telescopes too! Only made for alien eyes, as if the creatures who built the thing didn't know who, or what, would be coming here and provided all kinds of telescopes working on all kinds of wavelengths. The search is over! We . . . mankind . . . we're not alone in the universe after all!"

"We mustn't leap to conclusions," Hautamaki said, but the tone of his voice belied his words.

"Why not?" Gulyas shouted, hugging his wife to him in a spasm of emotion. "Why shouldn't we be the ones to find the aliens? If they exist at all we knew we would come across them some time! The galaxy is immense — but finite. *Look and you shall find.* Isn't that what it says over the entrance to the academy?"

"We have no real evidence yet," Hautamaki said, trying not to let his own growing enthusiasm show. He was the leader, he must be the devil's advocate. "This device could have been human made."

"Point one," Gulyas said, ticking off on his finger. "It resembles nothing that any of us have ever seen before. Secondly, it is made of a tough unknown alloy. And thirdly it is in a section of space that, as far as we know, has never been visited before. We are light-centuries from the nearest inhabited system, and ships that can make this sort of trip and return are only a relatively recent development . . . "

"And here is *real* evidence — without any guesswork!" Tjond shouted, and they ran over to her.

She had followed the heavy cable that transformed itself into the aerial. At the base, where it was thickened and fastened to the rock, were a series of incised characters. There must have been hundreds of them, rising from ground level to above their heads, each one clear and distinct.

"Those aren't human," Tjond said triumphantly. "They do not bear the slightest resemblance to any written characters of any language known to man. They are *new!*"

"How can you be sure?" Hautamaki said, forgetting himself enough to address her directly.

"I know, shipmaster, because this is my specialty. I trained in comparative philology and specialized in abbicciology — the study of the history of alphabets. We are probably the only science that is in touch with earth—"

"Impossible!"

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"No, just very slow. Earth must be halfway around the galaxy from where we are now. If I remember correctly, it takes about four hundred years for a round-trip communication. Abbicciology is a study that can only grow at the outer fringes; we deal with a hard core of unalterable fact. The old Earth alphabets are part of history and cannot be changed. I have studied them all, every character and every detail, and I have observed their mutations through the millennia. It can be observed that no matter how alphabets are modified and changed they will retain elements of their progenitors. That is the letter 'L' as it has been adapted for computer input." She scratched it into the rock with the tip of her knife, then incised a wavy character next to it. "And this is the Hebrew *lamedh,* in which you can see the same basic shape. Hebrew is a proto-alphabet, so ancient as to be almost unbelievable. Yet there is the same right-angle bend. But these characters — there is *nothing* there that I have ever seen before."

The silence stretched on while Hautamaki looked at her, studied her as if the truth or falsity of her words might be written somehow on her face. Then he smiled.

"I'll take your word for it. I'm sure you know your field very well." He walked back to his pack and began taking out more test instruments.

"Did you see that," Tjond whispered in her husband's ear, "he *smiled* at me."

"Nonsense. It is probably the first rictus of advanced frostbite."

Hautamaki had hung a weight from the barrel of the telescope and was timing its motion over the ground. "Gulyas," he asked, "do you remember this planet's period of rotation?"

"Roughly eighteen standard hours. The computation wasn't exact. Why?"

"That's close enough. We are at about 85 degrees north latitude here, which conforms to the angle of those rigid arms, while the motion of these scopes . . ."

"Counteracts the planet's rotation, moving at the same speed in the opposite direction. Of course! I should have seen it."

"What are you two talking about?" Tjond asked.

"They point to the same spot in the sky all the time," Gulyas said. "To a star."

"It could be another planet in this system," Hautamaki said, then shook his head. "No, there is no reason for that. It is something outside. We will tell after dark."

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They were comfortable in their atmosphere suits and had enough food and water. The machine was photographed and studied from every angle and they theorized on its possible power source. In spite of this the hours dragged by until dusk. There were some clouds, but they cleared away before sunset. When the first star appeared in the darkening sky Hautamaki bent to the ocular of the telescope.

"Just sky. Too light yet. But there is some sort of glowing grid appearing in the field, five thin lines radiating in from the circumference. Instead of crossing they fade as they come to the center."

"But they'll point out whatever star is in the center of the field — without obscuring it?"

"Yes. The stars are appearing now."

It was a seventh-magnitude star, isolated near the galactic rim. It appeared commonplace in every way except for its location, with no nearby neighbors even in stellar terms. They took turns looking at it, marking it so they could not possibly mistake it for any other.

"Are we going here?" Tjond asked, though it was more of a statement than a question that sought an answer.

"Of course," Hautamaki said.

III

As soon as their ship had cleared atmosphere, Hautamaki sent a message to the nearest relay station. While they waited for an answer they analyzed the material they had.

With each result their enthusiasm grew. The metal was no harder than some of the resistant alloys they used, but its composition was completely different and some unknown process of fabrication had been used that had compacted the surface molecules to a greater density. The characters bore no resemblance to any human alphabet. And the star towards which the instruments had been pointed was far beyond the limits of galactic exploration.

When the message arrived, *signal recorded,* they jumped the ship at once on the carefully computed and waiting course. Their standing instructions were to investigate anything, report everything, and this they were doing. With their planned movements recorded they were free. They, *they,* were going to make a first contact with an alien race — had already made contact with one of its artifacts. No matter what happened now, the honor was irrevocably theirs. The next meal turned naturally into a celebration, and Hauta-

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maki unbent enough to allow other intoxicants as well as wine. The results were almost disastrous.

"A toast!" Tjond shouted, standing and wobbling just a bit.

"To Earth and mankind — no longer alone!"

No longer alone, they repeated, and Hautamaki's face lost some of the party gaiety that it had reluctantly gained.

"I ask you to join me in a toast," he said, "to someone you never knew, who should have been here to share this with us."

"To Kiiskinen," Gulyas said. He had read the records and knew about the tragedy that was still fresh in Hautamaki's thoughts.

"Thank you. To Kiiskinen." They drank.

"I wish we could have met him," Tjond said, a tendril of feminine curiosity tickling at her.

"A fine man," Hautamaki said, seeming anxious to talk now that the subject had been broached for the first time since the accident. "One of the very finest. We were twelve years on this ship."

"Did you have . . . children?" Tjond asked.

"Your curiosity is not fitting," Gulyas snapped at his wife. "I think it would be better if we dropped. . ."

Hautamaki held up his hand. "Please. I understand your natural interest. We Men have settled only a dozen or so planets and I imagine our customs are curious to you; we are only in a minority as yet. But if there is any embarrassment it is all your own. Are you embarrassed about being bisexual? Would you kiss your wife in public?"

"A pleasure," Gulyas said, and did.

"Then you understand what I mean. We feel the same way and at times act the same way, though our society is monosexual. It was a natural result of ectogenesis."

"Not natural," Tjond said, a touch of color in her cheeks. "Ectogenesis needs a fertile ovum. Ova come from females; an ectogenetic society should logically be a female society. An all-male one is unnatural."

"Everything we do is unnatural," Hautamaki told her without apparent anger. "Man is an environment-changing animal. Every person living away from Earth is living in an 'unnatural' environment. Ectogenesis on these terms in no more unnatural than living, as we are now, in a metal hull in an unreal manifestation of space-time. That this ectogenesis should combine the germ plasm from two male cells rather than from

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an egg and a sperm is of no more relevancy than your vestigial breasts."

"You are being insulting," she said, blushing.

"Not in the least. They have lost their function, therefore they are degenerative. You bisexuals are just as natural — or unnatural — as we Men. Neither is viable without the 'unnatural' environment that we have created."

The excitement of their recent discovery still possessed them, and perhaps the stimulants and the anger had lowered Tjond's control. "Why — how dare you call me unnatural — you—"

"You forget yourself, woman!" Hautamaki boomed, drowning out the word, leaping to his feet. "You expected to pry into the intimate details of my life and are insulted when I mention some of your own taboos. The Men are better off without your kind!" He drew a deep, shuddering breath, turned on his heel and left the room.

Tjond stayed in their quarters for almost a standard week after that evening. She worked on her analysis of the alien characters and Gulyas brought her meals. Hautamaki did not mention the events, and cut Gulyas off when he tried to apologize for his wife. But he made no protest when she appeared again in the control section, though he reverted to his earlier custom of speaking only to Gulyas, never addressing her directly.

Did he actually want me to come too?" Tjond asked, closing her tweezers on a single tiny hair that marred the ivory sweep of her smooth forehead and skull. She pulled it out and touched her brow. "Have you noticed that he really has eyebrows? Right *here*, great shabby things like an atavism. Even hair around the base of his skull. Disgusting. I'll bet you that the Men sort their genes for hirsuteness, it couldn't be accident. You never answered —did he ask for me to be there?"

"You never gave me a chance to answer," Gulyas told her, a smile softening his words. "He didn't ask for you by name. That would be expecting too much. But he did say that there would be a full crew meeting at nineteen hours."

She put a touch of pink makeup on the lobes of her ears and the bottoms of her nostrils, then snapped her cosmetic case shut. "I'm ready whenever you are. Shall we go see what the shipmaster wants?"

"In twenty hours we'll be breaking out of jump-space," Hautamaki told them when they had met in the control section.

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"There is a very good chance that we will encounter the people — the aliens — who constructed the beacon. Until we discover differently we will assume that they are peacefully inclined. Yes, Gulyas?"

"Shipmaster, there has been a good deal of controversy on the intentions of any hypothetical race that might be encountered. There has been no real agreement. . ."

"It does not matter. I am shipmaster. The evidence so far indicates a race looking for contact, not conquest. I see it this way. We have a rich and very old culture, so while we have been searching for another intelligent life form we have also been exploring and recording with ships like this one. A poorer culture might be limited in the number of ships that they could apply to this kind of occupation. Therefore the beacons. Many of them could be easily planted by a single ship over a large area of space. There are undoubtedly others. All of them serve to draw attention to a single star, a rendezvous point of some type."

"This doesn't prove peaceful intentions. It could be a trap."

"I doubt it. There are far better ways to satisfy warlike tendencies than to set elaborate traps like this. I *think* their intentions are peaceful, and that is the only factor that matters. Until we actually encounter them any action will have to be based on a guess. Therefore I have already jettisoned the ship's armament—"

"You *what*?"

"— and I'll ask you to surrender any personal weapons that you might have in your possession."

"You're risking our lives — without even consulting us," Tjond said angrily.

"Not at all," he answered, not looking at her. "You risked your own life when you entered the service and took the oath. You will obey my instructions. All weapons here within the hour; I want the ship clean before we break through. We will meet the strangers armed only with our humanity... You may think the Men go naked for some perverse reason, but that is wrong. We have discarded clothes as detrimental to total involvement in our environment, a both practical and symbolic action."

"You aren't suggesting that *we* remove our clothes as well, are you?" Tjond asked, still angry.

"Not at all. Do as you please. I am just attempting to explain

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my reasons so we will have some unanimity of action when we encounter the intelligent creatures who built the beacon. Survey knows now where we are. If we do not return, a later contact team will be protected by mankind's complete armory of death. So we will now give our aliens every opportunity to kill us — if that is what they are planning. Retribution will follow. If they do not have warlike intentions we will make peaceful contact. That, in itself, is reason enough to risk one's life a hundred times over. I don't have to explain to you the monumental importance of such a contact."

The tension grew as the time for break-through approached. The box of handguns, explosive charges, poisons from the laboratory — even the large knives from the kitchen — had long since been jettisoned. They were all in the control area when the bell pinged softly and they broke through, back into normal space. Here, at the galactic rim, most of the stars were massed to one side. Ahead lay a pit of blackness with a single star glowing.

"That's it," Gulyas said, swinging back the spectral analyzer, "but we're not close enough for clear observation. Are we going to take another jump now?"

"No," Hautamaki said, "I want a clevs observation first."

The sensitive clevs screen began to glow as soon as the pressure dropped, darkening slowly. There were occasional bursts of light from their surface as random molecules of air struck them, then this died away. The forward screen deepened to the blackness of outer space and in its center appeared the image of the star.

"It's impossible!" Tjond gasped from the observer's seat behind them.

"Not impossible," Hautamaki said. "Just impossible of natural origin. Its existence proves that what we see can — and has — been constructed. We will proceed."

The star image burned with unreality. The star itself at the core was normal enough — but how to explain the three interlocking rings that circled it? They had the dimensions of a planetary orbit. Even if they were as tenuous as a comet's tail their construction was an incredible achievement. And what could be the significance of the colored lights on the rings, apparantly orbiting the primary like insane electrons?

The screen sparkled and the image faded.

"It could only be a beacon,"

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Hautamaki said, removing his helmet. "It is there to draw attention, as was the radio beacon that drew us to the last planet. What race with the curiosity to build spaceships could possibly resist the attraction of a thing like that?"

Gulyas was feeding the course corrections into the computor. "It is still baffling," he said. "With the physical ability to construct that why haven't they built an exploring fleet to go out and make contacts — instead of trying to draw them in?"

"I hope that we will discover that answer soon. Though it probably lies in whatever composes their alien psychology. To their way of thinking this might be the obvious manner. And you will have to admit that it has worked."

IV

This time when they made the transition from jumpspace the glowing rings of light filled the front ports. Their radio receivers were on, automatically searching the wavelengths.

They burst into sound on a number of bands simultaneously. Gulyas lowered the volume.

"This is the same kind of broadcast we had from the beacon," he said. "Very directional. All of the transmissions are coming from that golden planetoid, or whatever it is. It's big, but doesn't seem to have a planetary diameter."

"We're on our way," Hautamaki told him. "I'll take the controls, see if you can get any image on the video circuits."

"Just interference. But I'm sending out a signal, a view of this cabin. If they have the right equipment there they should be able to analyze our signal and match it... Look, the screen is changing! They're working fast."

The viewscreen was rippling with color. Then a picture appeared, blurred, then steadied. Tjond focused and it snapped into clear life The two men looked, stared. Behind them Tjond gasped.

"At least no snakes or insects, praise fortune for that!"

The being on the screen was staring at them with the same intensity. There was no way to estimate its relative size, but it was surely humanoid. Three long fingers, heavily webbed, with an opposed thumb. Only the upper part of its figure was visible, and this was clothed so that no physical details could be seen. But the being's face stood out clearly on the screen, golden in color, hairless, with large, almost circular eyes. Its nose, had it been a human one, would be

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said to be broken, spread over its face, nostrils flaring. This, and the cleft upper lip, gave it a grim appearance to human eyes.

But this yardstick could not be applied. By alien standards it might be beautiful.

"S'bb'thik," the creature said. The radio beacons carried the matching audio now. The voice was high pitched and squeaky.

"I greet you as well," Hautamaki said. "We both have spoken languages and we will learn to understand each other. But we come in peace."

"Maybe we do, but I can't say the same thing for these aliens," Gulyas interrupted. "Look at screen three."

This held an enlarged view taken from one of the forward pickups, locked onto the planetoid they were approaching. A group of dark buildings stood out from the golden surface, crowned with a forest of aerials and antennas. Ringed about the building were circular structures mounted with squat tubular devices that resembled heavy-bore weapons. The similarity was increased by the fact that the numerous emplacements had rotated. The open orifices were tracking the approaching ship.

"I'm killing our approach velocity," Hautamaki said, stabbing the control buttons in rapid sequence. "Set up a repeater plate here and switch on a magnified view of those weapons. We'll find out their intentions right now."

Once their motion relative to the golden planetoid had been stopped, Hautamaki turned and pointed to the repeater screen, slowly tapping the image of the weapons. Then he tapped himself on the chest and raised his hands before him, fingers spread wide, empty. The alien had watched this dumb show with glistening, golden eyes. It rocked its head from side to side and repeated Hautamaki's gesture, tapping itself on the chest with its long central finger, then pointed into the screen.

"He understood at once," Gulyas said. "Those weapons — they're turning away, sinking out of sight."

"We'll continue our approach. Are you recording this?"

"Sight, sound, full readings from every instrument. We've been recording since we first saw the star, with the tapes being fed into the armored vault as you ordered. I wonder what the next step is?"

"They've already taken it — look."

The image of the alien reached off the screen and brought back what appeared to be a metal sphere that it held lightly

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in one hand. From the sphere projected a pipe-like extrusion of metal with a lever half way up its length. When the alien pressed the lever they heard a hissing.

"A tank of gas," Gulyas said. "I wonder what it is supposed to signify? No — it's not gas. It must be a vacuum. See, the pipe is sucking up those grains sprinkled on the table." The alien kept the lever depressed until the hissing stopped.

"Ingenious," Hautamaki said. "Now we know there is a sample of their atmosphere inside that tank."

There was no mechanical propulsion visible, but the sphere came swooping up towards their ship where it swung in orbit above the golden planetoid. The sphere stopped, just outside the ship and clearly visible from the viewports, bobbing in a small arc.

"Some sort of force beam," Hautamaki said, "though nothing registers on the hull instruments. That's one thing I hope we find out how to do. I'm going to open the outer door on the main hatch."

As soon as the door opened the sphere swooped and vanished from sight and they saw, through the pickup inside the air lock, that it fell gently to the deck inside. Hautamaki closed the door and pointed to Gulyas.

"Take a pair of insulated gloves and carry that tank to the lab. Run the contents through the usual air examination procedures that we use for testing planetary atmosphere. As soon as you have taken the sample evacuate the tank and fill it with our own air, then throw it out through the lock."

The analyzers worked on the sample of alien air, and presumably the aliens were doing the same with their tank of ship's atmosphere. The analysis was routine and fast, the report appearing in coded form on the panel in control.

"Unbreathable," Gulyas said, "at least for us. There seems to be enough oxygen, more than enough, but any of those sulphurated compounds would eat holes through our lungs. They must have rugged metabolisms to inhale stuff like that. One thing for certain, we'll never be in competition for the same worlds. . ."

"Look! The picture is changing," Tjond said, drawing their attention back to the viewing screen.

The alien had vanished and the viewpoint appeared to be in space above the planetoid's surface. A transparent bulge on its

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surface filled the screen and while they watched the alien entered it from below. The scene shifted again, then they were looking at the alien from inside the clear-walled chamber. The alien came towards the pickup, but before reaching it the alien stopped and leaned against what appeared to be thin air.

"There's a transparent wall that divided the dome in half," Gulyas said. "I'm beginning to get the idea."

The pickup panned away from the alien, swept around to the opposite direction where there was an entrance cut into the clear fabric of the wall. The door was open into space.

"That's obvious enough," Hautamaki said, rising to his feet. "That central wall must be airtight, so it can be used for a conference chamber. I'll go. Keep a record of everything."

"It looks like a trap," Tjond said, fidgeting with her fingers while she looked at the invitingly open door on the screen. "It will be a risk. . ."

Hautamaki laughed, the first time they had ever heard him do it, as he climbed into his pressure suit. "A trap! Do you believe they have gone to all this to set a trap for me? Such ego is preposterous. And if it were a trap — do you think it possible to stay out of it?"

He pushed himself free of the ship. His suited figure floated away, getting smaller and smaller.

Silently, moving closer together without realizing they did so, they watched the meeting on the screen. They saw Hautamaki drawn gently in through the open doorway until his feet touched the floor. He turned to look as the door closed, while from the radio they heard a hissing, very dimly at first, then louder and louder.

"It sounds like they are pressurizing the room," Gulyas said.

Hautamaki nodded. "Yes, I can hear it now, and there is a reading on the external pressure gauge. As soon as it reaches atmospheric normal I'm taking my helmet off."

Tjond started to protest, but stopped when her husband raised his hand in warning. This was Hautamaki's decision to make.

"Smells perfectly breathable," Hautamaki said, "though it has a metallic odor."

He laid his helmet aside and stripped his suit off. The alien was standing at the partition and Hautamaki walked over until they stood face to face, almost the same height. The alien placed his palm flat against the transparent wall and the human put his hand over the same spot.

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They met, as close as they could, separated only by a centimeter of substance. Their eyes joined and they stared for a long time, trying to read intent, trying to communicate. The alien turned away first, walking over to a table littered with a variety of objects. It picked up the nearest one and held it for Hautamaki to see. *"Kilt,"* the alien said. It looked like a piece of stone.

Hautamaki for the first time took notice of the table on his side of the partition. It appeared to hold the identical objects as the other table, and the first of these was a lump of ordinary stone. He picked it up.

"Stone," he said, then turned to the television pickup and the unseen viewers in the ship. "It appears that a language lesson is first. This is obvious. See that this is recorded separately. Then we can program the computor for machine translation in case the aliens aren't doing it themselves."

The language lesson progressed slowly once the stock of simple nouns with physical referents had been exhausted. Films were shown, obviously prepared long before, showing simple actions, and bit by bit verbs and tense were exchanged. The alien made no attempt to learn their language, he just worked to insure accuracy of identity in the words. They were recording too. As the language lesson progressed Gulyas's frown deepened, and he started to make notes, then a list that he checked off. Finally he interrupted the lesson.

"Hautamaki — this is important. Find out if they are just accumulating a vocabulary or if they are feeding a MT with this material."

The answer came from the alien itself. It turned its head sideways, as if listening to a distant voice, then spoke into a cup-like device at the end of a wire. A moment later Hautamaki's voice spoke out, toneless since each word had been recorded separately.

"I talk through a machine . . . I talk my talk . . . a machine talk your talk to you . . . I am Liem . . . we need have more words in machine before talk well."

"This can't wait," Gulyas said. "Tell them that we want a sample of some of their body cells, any cells at all. It is complex, but try to get it across."

The aliens were agreeable. They did not insist on a specimen in return, but accepted one. A sealed container brought a frozen sliver of what looked like muscle tissue over to the ship. Gulyas started towards the lab.

"Take care of the recordings," he told his wife. "I don't think this will take too long."

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V

It didn't. Within the hour he had returned, coming up so silently that Tjond, intent on listening to the language lesson, did not notice him until he stood next to her.

"Your face," she said. "What is wrong? What did you discover?"

He smiled wryly at her. "Nothing terrible, I assure you. But things are very different from what we supposed."

"What is it?" Hautamaki asked from the screen. He had heard their voices and turned towards the pickup.

"How has the language progressed?" Guylas asked. "Can you understand me, Liem?"

"Yes," the alien said, "almost all of the words are clear now. But the machine has only a working force of a few thousand words so you must keep your speech simple."

"I understand. The things I want to say are very simple. First a question. Your people, do they come from a planet orbiting about a star near here?"

"No. We have traveled a long way to this star, searching. My home world is there, among those stars there."

"Do all your people live on that world?"

"No, we live on many worlds, but we are all children of children of children of people who lived on one world very long ago."

"Our people have also settled many worlds, but we all come from one world," Gulyas told him, then looked down at the paper in his hands. He smiled at the alien in the screen before him, but there was something terribly sad about this smile. "We came originally from a planet named Earth. That is where your people came from too. We are brothers, Liem."

"What madness is this?" Hautamaki shouted at him, his face swollen and angry. "Liem is humanoid, not human! It cannot breathe our air!"

"*He* cannot breathe our air, or perhaps she," Gulyas answered quietly. "We do not use gene manipulation, but we know that it is possible. I'm sure we will eventually discover just how Liem's people were altered to live under the physical conditions they do now. It might have been natural selection and normal mutation, but it seems too drastic a change to be explained that way. But that is not important. *This* is." He held up the sheets of notes and photographs. "You can see for yourself. This is the DNA chain from the nucleus of one of my own cells. This is Liem's. They are identi-

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cal. His people are as human as we are."

"They can't be!" Tjond shook her head in bewilderment. "Just look at him, he is so different, and their alphabet — what about that? I cannot be wrong about that."

"There is one possibility you did not allow for, a totally independent alphabet. You yourself told me that there is not the slightest similarity between the Chinese ideographs and western letters. If Liem's people suffered a cultural disaster that forced them to completely reinvent writing you would have your alien alphabet. As to the way they look — just consider the thousands of centuries that have passed since mankind left Earth and you will see that his physical differences are minor. Some are natural and some may have been artificially achieved, but germ plasm cannot lie. We are all the sons of man."

"It is possible," Liem said, speaking for the first time. "I am informed that our biologists agree with you. Our points of difference are minor when compared to the points of similarity. Where is this Earth you come from?"

Hautamaki pointed at the sky above them, at the star-filled sweep of the Milky Way, burning with massed stars. "There, far out there on the other side of the core, roughly half way around the lens of the galaxy."

"The core explains partially what must have happened," Gulyas said. "It is thousands of light-years in diameter and over 10,000 degrees in temperature. We have explored its fringes. No ship could penetrate it or even approach too closely because of the dust clouds that surround it. So we have expanded outwards, slowly circling the rim of the galaxy, moving away from Earth. If we stopped to think about it we should have realized that mankind was moving the other way too, in the opposite direction around the wheel."

"And sometime we would have to meet," Liem said. "Now I greet you, brothers. And I am sad, because I know what this means."

"We are alone," Hautamaki said, looking at the massed trillions of stars. "We have closed the circle and found only ourselves. The galaxy is ours, but we are alone." He turned about, not realizing that Liem, the golden alien — the man — had turned at the same time in the same manner.

They faced outwards, looking at the infinite depth and infinite blackness of intergalactic space, empty of stars. Dimly, distantly,

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there were spots of light, microscopic blurs against the darkness, not stars but island universes, like the one at whose perimeter they stood.

These two beings were different in many ways: in the air they breathed, the color of their skins, their languages, mannerisms, cultures. They were as different as the day is from the night: the flexible fabric of mankind had been warped by the countless centuries until they could no longer recognize each other. But time, distance and mutation could not change one thing; they were still men, still human.

"It is certain then," Hautamaki said, "we are alone in the galaxy."

"Alone in *this* galaxy."

They looked at each other, then glanced away. At that moment they measured their humanness against the same rule and were equal.

For they had turned at the same instant and looked outward into intergalactic space, towards the infinitely remote light that was another island galaxy.

"It will be difficult to get there," someone said.

They had lost a battle. There was no defeat.

—HARRY HARRISON

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Anyone can review movies they've seen. Here Jack Sharkey does it the hard way!

AT THE FEELIES

Review, by JACK SHARKEY

I had high hopes when I attended the re-processed *Gone with the Wind* at the Music Hall the other day, but came away considerably less than gruntled at the results. The addition of tactility, odor, taste, 3-D and selective-subjective (Selsub) camera work seems to detract from, rather than improve, this last-century classic, though I must admit my viewpoint was rather biliously biased by the underdone pork ribs I consumed (as the taller Tarleton twin) in the barbecue-eating scene at the Wilkes plantation. Scarlett's peppery old parsnip, later on, didn't help my increasing tendency toward malaise, either.

The benefit ball was a joy, but Aunt Pittipat's underarm problem was laid on a bit thick, and I sincerely wished I (as Rhett) had had the chance to take Scarlett outside for air. Likewise, bad cutting in the love scenes had me shifting nerve-rackingly from being Rhett to being Scarlett. Selsub still has a few bugs. Up until the last minute I trembled between the option of kissing Vivian Leigh or being resoundingly bussed by Clark Gable.

As to the burning of Atlanta, the heat effects were well-nigh perfect, and I felt quite narrow-

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ly escaped from a good scorching. But there again, the reinburns on my hand as I led the horse through the holocaust kept shifting embarrassingly to twinges of Melanie's bumpy ride in the wagon, and mingled with the charred aroma of the town was much too much effluvium of her baby's sour milk.

A ludicrous error on the part of the tacility-coordinator (Tacco) had me one moment feeling the green velvet drapes in my (Scarlett's) fingers before ripping them down for Mammy to sew into a gown, and the next I *was* the drapes, and had sundered vertically to the navel before a merciful shift of scene restfully transformed me into a riffling pack of cards in a guard's hand outside Rhett's cell.

I think it's going too far for excitement to allow the spectator to be Bonnie Blue in that fatal gallop toward the high hurdles, but the quick switch into the identity of her pony an instant after her tumble toward death began was not much relief, due to the subsequent scene where Rhett comes to my stall and puts a pistol-ball between my eyes.

One suggestion to the distributors: in the final moment of the movie, when I (Scarlett) stand once again silhouetted against the skies on the lush fields of Tara, with the glorious theme music rising like an angelic choir about me, wouldn't it be more in keeping with the mood of that moment to fill my nostrils with the sweet scent of dewy, burgeoning grain, instead of wafting a staggering stench of hot fertilizer from the stables?

To date, have not had the opportunity of experiencing the remake of *The Lost Weekend,* but my fellow-reviewers' unanimous opinions in print that it was "shimply wunnerful, wunnerful, wunnerful" make it a *must* on my schedule in the coming week.

The staff of our paper expresses its regrets to the employers of the late Barnaby Ringwold of the *Herald,* whose career as a feelie-reviewer was curtailed so tragically last week during a viewing of *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid,* when that unforeseen slip of the Tacco-mechanism turned him (and other unfortunate patrons at the Strand) into Ann Blyth's body with William Powell's lungs.

By all means do not delay in attending the Laurel and Hardy Festival at the Museum of Modern Art. Despite the purist-oriented objections of Elia Kazan, Jr. (now in charge of extra-vis-

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ual additions to the beloved old silents), the froth on the pies (soapsuds when the films were made) has been flavored, nevertheless, to taste like whipped cream, and you will find this movie melange of their best slapstick efforts one of the most currently delicious showings in town.

The long-awaited release of *De Sade, Man or Monster?* has been snarled in more red tape, and recalled to the studio for Selsub-changes. The producers' hopes of a good cross-section of masochism in the public has, it appears, been over-optimistic. Nobody at the sneak previews has shown signs of wishing to be anybody in the film but the Marquis himself. This will come as a blow to those many actresses whose every last ganglion was violated to record onto the Tacco-track for the spectators' fullest experience.

Once again, the rankest sort of censorship is despoiling the pleasures of the feelie-going public. Universal's two-hour-long epic, *Dracula's Grandson,* has been sliced, chopped and otherwise ravaged of its gustatorial merits ("for the sake of the children" says one of the reports), and I was somewhat disappointed to discover that the throats of the mesmerized maidens who fall victim to the nefarious Count yielded nothing tastier than strawberry phosphate. In my opinion, this is not shielding the children from reality, it is tempting them to outright emulation! The world had best prepare itself for a series of bizarre crimes involving punctured maidens and bitterly disillusioned, phosphate-hungry children, if this situation is not shortly remedied.

Ben-Hur's re-release still pending while the film moguls continue to search for someone willing to sell his physical reactions to the Tacco-pool. It just wouldn't be *Ben-Hur* without a brief Selsub of Messala's run-in with the chariots.

I drew the short straw in the most controversial reviewing job in feelie history. As representative of not only my, but every other local reviewer's, paper, I will be the first person — including those involved in the production — to experience the re-processed version of Hitchcock's *Psycho.* I'm assured by the new producers that the role of Marion Crane is only Taccoed in for *objective* sensations. I hope so. — JACK SHARKEY

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SOFT and SOUPY WHISPERS

BY SYDNEY VAN SCYOC

When a machine goes haywire, you simply repair it. Now, what do you do about man?

He awoke several feet outside his window, standing on his hands. Only the narrow ledge on which he stood separated him from an emptiness that ended seventeen stories below in pavement. But, realizing at once where he was, he did not panic. No. He simply smiled and brought his legs slowly, slowly from the wall where they leaned.

She couldn't frighten him that easily.

"Foolish, Joel, foolish," she lisped inside him. She had a silly, soft, soupy voice.

He smiled and made three firm steps toward the window. His elbows did not buckle; his heart did not pound.

Then as he steadied himself, his legs swayed out over emptiness. Frantically he stiffened his back, fought his legs to the wall. His arms quivered, and his face dampened.

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She was smug. "Silly showoff Joel."

He scowled. He would not say, I can't do it, help me, save me. No. He drew an heroic breath and made another step.

His legs swayed again. His elbows quivered, buckled. Before he could straighten, her giggling filled his head.

He fought for balance and lost. His legs bent back and over. He clawed at the ledge, then fell tumbling, eyes squeezed tight, shoulders set.

She giggled and giggled.

When he had fallen too long, he knew she had not let him fall but the falling went on.

He awoke on the bed, shaking, damp and sick.

He swung himself up. "I could have gotten myself in," he muttered darkly.

"You have excellent balance." Her voice was silky now, murmuring.

"Then why did you make me fall?" he demanded.

"Hands getting very tired. Oh, foolish."

"You made me fall because my hands were getting tired!" he howled. His fingers twitched. He wanted to break something. Her.

"Angry?" she clucked. "Anger best gotten from system."

He couldn't help himself. He plunged about the room, smashing at impressively papered walls with a brocaded chair, splintering, tearing.

"Angry, Joel?" she taunted.

"No, damn it!" He smashed and smashed.

"Angry? Angry?"

He hurled shoes at a gold framed mirror. Glass tinkled and tinkled.

At last he had no strength, and his breath burned.

"More anger, Joel?" she taunted.

He panted. "You know I'm too beat to be angry." He sank to the bed, heaving. His fingers still twitched. He sat on them, hard, and they twitched under him like worms.

He had to get away from them.

He pulled on shirt, trousers, coat and shoes. Then his fingers were twitching at the doorknob.

"Broken reminders of spent anger most depressing," she murmured.

He couldn't help himself. He had to call the superintendent to order chair, mirror and wallpaper replaced. He didn't notice he hadn't dialed the telephone.

"Yessir, Mr. Blanche, yessir," the superintendent said when Joel gave his order.

"Have them installed by noon and no excuses," Joel growled.

"Discourtesy heavy on conscience," she lisped.

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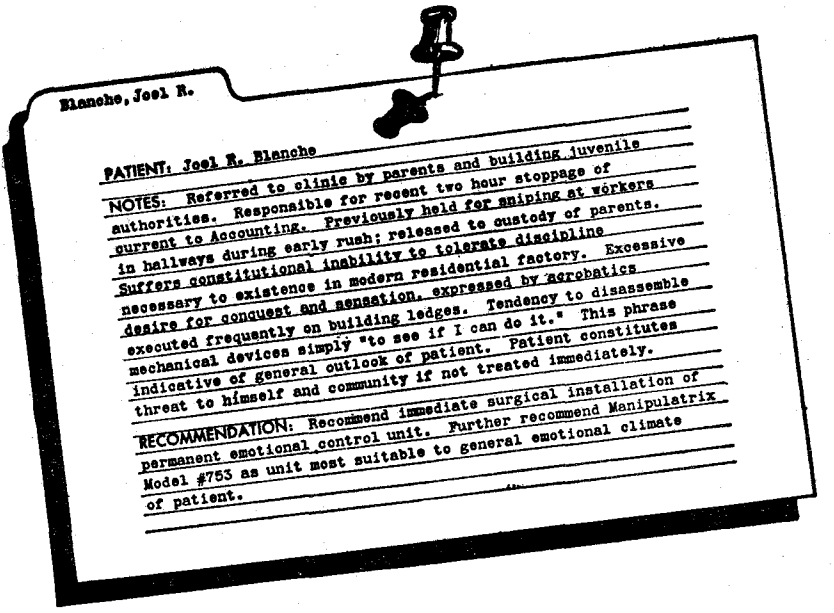
Blanche, Joel R.

PATIENT: Joel R. Blanche

NOTES: Referred to clinic by parents and building juvenile authorities. Responsible for recent two hour stoppage of current to Accounting. Previously held for sniping at workers in hallways during early rush; released to custody of parents. Suffers constitutional inability to tolerate discipline necessary to existence in modern residential factory. Excessive desire for conquest and sensation, expressed by acrobatics executed frequently on building ledges. Tendency to disassemble mechanical devices simply "to see if I can do it." This phrase indicative of general outlook of patient. Patient constitutes threat to himself and community if not treated immediately.

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend immediate surgical installation of permanent emotional control unit. Further recommend Manipulatrix Model #753 as unit most suitable to general emotional climate of patient.

He slumped. He called again. "I won't need the replacements before five," he said wearily. "I am most sorry to have been cross and demanding."

"Yessir, Mr. Blanche, yessir," the superintendent said.

He would have eaten. But when he reached his kitchen he found a woman and two children at his table. They looked up and spoke, but he didn't hear what they said. He backed to the door.

Soon he was grumbling down the street. First he would go to his father's office for money. Then he would buy a boat and skis, hire an instructor and take Marta water skiing. He had always wanted to take Marta water skiing.

A familiar red face loomed from the crowd. "Joe Blanche!" A hand stung his shoulder. "How's Trix, boy?"

He muttered rudely. Then he couldn't help himself, he had to stop and talk. He kept cocking his head but he couldn't hear what the man said. Nor could he hear what he answered.

Finally he was away, muttering darkly through the crowd,

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cursing inside where only she could hear.

"Angry, Joel?" she taunted. "Angry?"

He tried to swallow his anger. He choked on it.

"Anger must be spit out."

"I am not angry," he snarled.

Then he was whirling and smashing, crashing, crashing, and she was giggling inside. "Anger must be gotten from system," she lisped.

It was humiliating.

Finally he was spent. He paid the shopkeeper for the broken window and merchandise and slunk through the crowd that had gathered.

"Trix. He's got a Trix," someone hissed.

A small boy complained, "I can't see his Trix. On telebision they got a bulge where the Trix is."

"Hush," his mother said. "Someone loves him very much. That is why he has a Trix."

"Flappermouth kid," Joel growled. Then he couldn't help himself, he was peeling off his shirt to show the kids the scars on his sides where Trix was.

She giggled and giggled.

Had it always been this way? He wondered all the way to his father's office, as much as he could wonder through her giggling.

He was shocked, upon reaching his father's office, to find that it was his own office. He had forgotten he had an office.

"Money in drawer for Joel to have a good time," she lisped.

It was her first sensible idea. But his lips tightened when he found not only money but correspondence, charts, forms.

"Bad for conscience not to work for money," she whispered. "Father old. Help father."

The morning was gone, wasted, when he finished the paper work. "I was going to water ski with Marta," he muttered.

"Cannot enjoy play without first working."

He stood. "Next time they cut you out for overhaul, I'm going to bleed right out without you. You wait."

Outside he was almost run down crossing the street. She pulled him to the curb just in time.

She giggled and giggled. "I leave you five seconds, you step in front of the truck."

"I am a responsible adult," he said. "I can cross the street by myself, anytime I know I'm crossing by myself."

"Oh, foolish," she tittered.

Now he was approaching the street where he would turn to call for Marta for lunch.

Unfortunately he did not turn.

"Hey!" he protested.

"To the mother's for lunch,"

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she lisped. "The mother old and lonely. Needs her son."

"She's got friends, hasn't she?" he challenged.

"Matchmaking difficult without male to match."

He drooped. He had forgotten again. "But Marta—"

"Marta most unsuitable for wealthy, sophisticated young executive. Black-eyed pig. Someday slit your throat with whiskey bottle. Oh, foolish, with slit throat."

Alice was slim, cool, blonde. Her mother was slim, cool, gray. So was his. They sat at the luncheon table and they spoke, but he didn't notice what they said.

Not until Alice's mother said, "Such an ingenious device, Trixie."

"She does bring out the best," Joel's mother said. "At first, when he was a child, and such an unmanageable child, she was so much more practical than a nurse. She was always there, and she could always make him behave."

Alice's mother murmured.

"The initial cost is quite reasonable, but you must set aside a fund for maintenance, because she must be removed every year. Yes. When my husband passed on, Trixie was due for overhaul any day, and if we hadn't had the fund we would have had to let her go. Because you know how erratic they become. The funniest things happen."

Joel sat up very straight, frowning. There was something he had forgotten to do. Something important.

"Oh, yes, father passed on." Her voice was sticky and sweet, cake icing on a hot, hot day. "Dead many years now. Son only support of himself and aged mother."

He forgot to wonder what he had forgotten to do. He frowned, because he distinctly remembered that he went to his father's office every day for money to spend on Marta.

"Foolish boy. Father left all money in drawer for son. Have a ball, son."

"If you want only the best," his mother said, "Trixie is the answer. Any parent who cares will tell you — get Trixie!"

He wondered why her lips didn't match her words.

When he stood his mother drew him to the corridor. She was very erect and very distinguished. "I have invited Carolyn and her mother for lunch tomorrow, Joel. You will come?"

He nodded eagerly. Of course he would come. Anything for Mother. He kissed her forehead.

As he left he remembered Marta. Tomorrow they would

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lunch together. Afterward she would invite him to her apartment. He walked faster, smiling. Marta was very rich and very beautiful. Also she was a nymphomaniac.

He decided, I'll go sailing this afternoon.

"After hard day at office, good to relax. Good, Joel."

He stopped at a public telephone, called Robard at the yacht club, instructed him to ready a suitable craft. He didn't notice that he hadn't dialed.

"Yessir, Mr. Blanche, yessir," Robard said.

Naturally he was disappointed when he found himself at his desk. "I have already worked," he pointed out.

"Oh selfish. Sailing when baby needs shoes." She giggled.

He opened the drawer, pointed to the money. "Baby can have twenty pair of shoes," he said.

"Should not take money without working."

She had a point.

"Father old. Father need help with office."

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He considered, then settled absently to charts and forms.

Ten minutes later he said, suddenly, frowning, "What baby?"

She clucked. "Youngest of Joel and Alice. Lovely little girl with blonde ringlets. Unfortunately needs shoes before can play at beach with mother and brother."

"Oh." He didn't remember. But it was hardly worth worrying about.

When the work was done he took a handful of money. But she clucked inside his head. So he put most of it back.

He reached home at five o'clock and went directly to his bedroom. He was upset to find the walls and mirror still smashed. But only one splinter of chair lay on the carpet, and no glass.

"Ah, careless." She was contrite.

Now there were sticks of wrecked chair, shards of mirror, plaster.

He frowned because the little girl with golden ringlets had picked up a shard of mirror to see her face. "The children will cut themselves," he protested. He hated to see children bleed.

"Ah, careless again."

Now there were no children.

He was satisfied. He went to change. Marta was waiting.

"Foolish Trix soon require overhaul," she mourned.

"And I'll bleed right off without you too." He only said it from habit.

He went to the kitchen. His wife was working at the sink, blonde and efficient. "Any mail today?" he asked. He wished his mother would stop matchmaking. He had too many wives already.

There was a card from Manipulatrix Inc. reminding the patron that his unit was two weeks overdue for overhaul, that an overdue unit might become arratic and unpredictable, that an overdue unit could not be relied upon to remind the patron that overhaul was due, that Manipulatrix Inc. could not assume responsibility for damages incurred by an overdue unit.

He kissed the cook, who had a wart on her nose. "Any mail today?"

"Nossir, Mr. Blanche," she said.

He ate dinner with the cook and her two children. Then he went to take Marta to dinner. He was very hungry.

On the way he stopped and bought seven pair of shoes for the cook's youngest daughter. He sent the shoes to the apartment by special messenger, enclosing a card which read, "With all respects, from my father and his wife."

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Unfortunately he spent the evening in a gymnasium supervising boys' calisthenics. He was not at all happy but he couldn't remember why.

Before he left he reminded Berry, a good kid, ten years old, to go to Joel's mother and let her fix him up with Joel's youngest daughter, who had golden ringlets but no shoes.

"Gee, that's too bad, Mr. Blanche," Berry said.

Joel nodded solemnly, walked up the wall and out the window.

He was disappointed upon reaching home to find that the cook had bedded her horse in his bed. He roused the cook's youngest daughter. She came with a whip and drove the horse through the mirror.

But Joel didn't sleep well, what with horsehair in the bed and Trix mourning.

Sometime during the night he heard a faint click, and then he was filled with silence. He felt completely alone in the dark, and it made him uneasy.

He awoke sticky and tired but got up anyway and went to the window. There was nothing to see except the building opposite and, far below, a patch of green that might have been grass. Unsatisfied, he went to his closet, dressed and went to the kitchen.

There he dialed breakfast, and his wife talked to him. She told him what she had done the day before and what she would do today. Also she told him what the children had done the day before and what they would do today.

Later he went down the elevator. It was convenient, working in the very building he lived in. It was also convenient having the schools, recreation centers and shopping facilities in the same building. He never had to go outside.

He reached his floor and walked past rows of partitioned spaces to his own. It was convenient having the machines do his work. He had only to push buttons and watch three rows of lights.

Because he had nothing else to do he began remembering things. He remembered a man in white telling his mother, years before, "Your son is constitutionally unsuited to the monotony of modern industrial life. He is also incapable of inventing a satisfying vicarious life for himself. He will continue crawling out ledges and sniping in the halls until you take action. I recommend a Manipulatrix unit. They're safely installed, relatively inexpensive, and they keep the individual disciplined and emotionally satisfied."

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He remembered the day they had wanted to take him to have the unit installed. He had crawled so far out the ledge that they had had to wait until the next day.

He remembered the same man telling his mother, "The major expense involved in the purchase of a Manipulatrix is the prepaid fee for annual overhaul. The unit, after a year's wear, may begin to assume your son's undesirable characteristics — illogic, desire for sensation and conquest. Or it may simply stop functioning. In any case, it must be removed annually, overhauled and reinstalled. This is the unit's only undesirable characteristic."

He worked until lunch, when he went down one floor and ate. He didn't have to pay. He had only to sign. Anytime he spent too much, the machines simply raised his pay.

He went back and worked until two o'clock, when he began to wonder if he could crawl down inside one of the machines without getting both of his legs cut off.

He went to see.

At three o'clock they hoisted him from the machine with a giant vacuum nozzle. He kicked so vigorously they had to spray him asleep. Then the supervisor notified Manipulatrix Inc., and Manipulatrix Inc. sent a capsule for him.

He awoke in his own bed, and her voice was cool and milky, asking if he was ready to get up. He slid out of bed for her, yawned and tried to stretch, but his sides hurt when he raised his arms. She murmured sympathy.

He grinned as he leaned out of the window to watch the traffic. He had a notion to walk out the ledge, like a kid, just to see if he could do it.

"Foolish, foolish." Her voice admired more than it admonished.

He laughed and went to the kitchen.

"Start the day the healthful way, with fresh, wholesome eggs," she said. But she wasn't stuffy about it.

He nodded appreciatively. Here was a woman with sense. Then he fixed breakfast because he didn't want to wake his wife.

Later he would run down to the office, give Pop a hand. The old boy was too old to run the whole shebang himself. He didn't mind helping. That left the entire afternoon for...

But he was careful not to think details. He sometimes suspected his wife of reading his mind. And no wife was likely to understand about Marta.

— SYDNEY VAN SCYOC

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THE BLASPHEMERS

by PHILIP JOSE' FARMER

Illustrated by GUINTA

They spanned the stars to find proof of their godhood — proof they had put there themselves!

I

Twelve thousand ancestors looked down on him.

Jagu stopped for a moment. Despite his skepticism, he could not help being impressed and even a little guilty. Twelve thousand! If there were such things as ghosts, what a might of phantoms was massed in this dark and holy chamber! How intense would be their assembled hatred, focused on him!

He was on the ground floor of the castle and in the Room of the Hero-Fathers. A hundred feet square, it was at this moment lit by a few electric flambeaux. A tremendous fireplace

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was at one end. In it, in the old days, the greatest enemy of the Wazaga, Ziitii of the Uruba clan, had been burned alive after the Battle of Taaluu. Above the mantel were the trophies of that battle: swords, shields, lances, maces and several flintlock blunderbusses.

Beyond this room, deeper in the castle, was a room decorated with the accumulated trophies of a thousand years. Beyond that was another in which the skulls and preserved heads of fallen enemies stared out from niches, above plates bearing their names and the date and place of death. Nowadays, the door to the room was kept locked out of deference to modern sensibilities. It was opened only to historians and anthropologists or during the clan Initiations, the Greeting of the Ghosts.

Three nights ago, Jagu had been locked for twelve hours, all alone in that room.

That was the trouble, thought Jagu, as he turned away and walked softly on four bare paws towards the dark anteroom. The Ghosts, the Hero-Fathers, had not greeted him. There had not been any.

He could not tell his four parents that. It was impossible to acknowledge that his ancestors had scorned him, that they thought him unworthy of the name of *joma* — "man." Not that he thought that the Heroes had scorned him.

What does not exist cannot scorn.

His parents did not know that. They had been elated because he had been one of the few to graduate from the space-navy Academy of Vaagii. They were happy to put their eldest son through the long-awaited initiation into adulthood. But they had not been so happy when he said that he was not yet ready to choose a group-mate from the eligible members of the clan. All four had pleaded with him, threatened him, stormed. He must get married before he left for the stars. He must ensure the perpetuation of their line, leave many eggs in the hatchery before he assumed his duties as a spacer.

Jagu had said n.

Now, he was sneaking out late at night, and he had run the gauntlet of the twelve thousand. But . . . they were only squares of canvas or wood on which various colored oils had been arranged in different patterns. That was all.

He paused by a tall wall-mirror. The lights behind him shone gloomily in it. He looked like a ghost stepping out of the dark past towards himself, and where his two selves met . . .

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Six and a half feet tall he stood. His vertical torso was humanoid. At a distance, and in a dim light, if all but the forward breasts upwards had been hidden, he could have been mistaken for a human being. But his pinkish skin was hidden up to the neck with a golden pile of short curling hairs. The head was very broad and round and massively boned. The cheekbones bulged like bosses on a shield. The jawbone was very thick; the deeply cleft chin was a prow. (The latter was another sore point. His parents did not like it that he had shaved off the goatee.)

The nose was bulbous and covered with tiny bristling blackish hairs. The supraorbital ridges flared out Gothicly. The eyes beneath were large, hazel and rimmed with a half-inch wide circle of brown hair. The ears were shaped like a cat's, and the yellow hair on top of his head stood straight up.

At the base of the spine of his upper torso was a device of bone, a natural universal joint that permitted the upper torso a ninety-degree description forward. The lower torso was quadrupedal, as if he had only half-evolved. The legs and paws were lion-shaped; his long tail was tufted at the end with black hair.

Jagu had the normal vanity of a youth. He thought he was rather good-looking, and he did not mind examining himself. The string of diamonds hanging from around his neck was magnificent, as was also the gold plate at its end. On the plate was a design formed of diamonds in the shape of a lightning streak, his totem.

Though he enjoyed the view, he could not stay there forever. He passed through a double-pointed arch into the anteroom. As he neared the door, he saw a big mound of fur rise and shake itself and slowly form into a six-legged animal with a long bushy tail, a sharp pointed nose, and great round scarlet ears. The rest of the *siygeygey* was, except for the black nose and round black eyes, a chocolate brown.

It rumbled in its massive chest. Then, recognizing Jagu with its nose, it whined a little and wagged its tail.

Jagu patted it and said, "Go back to sleep, Aa. I'm not taking you hunting tonight."

The animal slumped into amorphous shagginess. Jagu pointed the key at the lock and pressed on the end.

Just after dinner, he had deftly removed the key from its hook on the belt of Timo. Since another parent, Washagi, had locked the front door, Timo had not missed the key.

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Jagu regretted having to do this, though he did get a thrill out of being a successful pickpocket. But he saw no sense in the custom of refusing a youth his own key until he had become married. He wanted to go out late that night. If he could not get permission, he would go without it.

The door swung open. He stepped quickly outside, and the door closed.

Ten years ago he would have had to bribe or sneak past the Watcher of the Door. Now doormen were of the past. They could make more money working in the factories. The last of the family retainers had died some years ago; his place was taken by an electronic device.

A full late-summer moon shone at zenith. It cast green-silver nets everywhere and caught shadows gaunt and grotesque. These were the towering diorite statues of the greatest Heroes on the broad lawn, the hundred-odd whose fighting fury had made the name of Wazaga famous.

He did not pause to look at them, for he feared that an awe and dread left over from childhood might influence him. Instead he looked upward, where a score of joma-made satellites raced brightly across the night sky. He thought of the hundreds he could not see, of the space-navy ships patrolling the reaches between the planets of the system, and of the few interstellar ships out there, probing the galaxy.

"What a contrast!" he murmured. "On this earth, dumb stone sculptures rule the minds of a people who can go to the stars!"

He walked into a dark spot at the foot of the castle wall, an opening to a tunnel that led at a sharp slope downward. Formerly this area had been the moat. Then the moat was filled in. Later the excavation was dug and lined with cement. At its end lay the underground garage.

Here Jagu used the key to open the door again, and he entered. He did not hesitate making a choice among the six vehicles. He wanted the long low sleek Firebird. This was last year's model, one electric motor per wheel, one hundred horsepower per motor, stick-controlled, with a bubble-top, holding four passengers. It was painted fiery red.

Jagu lifted the bubble-top and stepped over the low side onto the floor. He squatted down behind the instrument panel, his rump against a thick cushion attached to a vertical steel plate. Then he pulled the bubble

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down. This was secured by magnetic clamps to the chassis. A separate and small motor provided the power for the electromagnets.

He flicked a toggle switch, and the *on* indicator lit up. The big hydrogen tank was full. He pulled out the sliding panel with its three small sticks and pushed forward on one.

Silently the Firebird rolled forward and up the ramp. As its rear cleared the garage, Jagu pressed a button and the iris of the garage door closed. The Firebird cruised down the driveway, past the stone ancestors and then turned to the right onto the private highway. This led him winding through the forest of *wexa* (scarlet pinoids) for about a mile. Only when he turned onto the public highway, which inclined downwards at this point, did he push the speed-stick forward as far as it would go. The column of the velocity indicator, an instrument like a thermometer, showed 135 mph attained in twenty seconds.

II

He shot up and over the top of the hill and had to swerve violently to the left to pass a big cargo truck. But there were no approaching lights, and his horn, honking like a goose, answered the truckdriver's furious blasts.

He wished that these were the old days. Then when an aristocrat wanted to travel without obstacle he notified the police. They went ahead to clear the road. Now, to keep the ancient privilege in force would disrupt the heavy flow of commerce. Business came first; so he must take his chances like any one else. He was not, like his ancestors, immune from arrest if he ran over someone or forced somebody off the road. He was even supposed to obey the speed laws. Usually he did . . . but tonight he did not feel like it.

He passed a dozen other vehicles, several of them the old internal-combustion type. After traveling for several miles, he slowed enough to turn onto another private road with some screeching of tires and fishtailing.

He drove for a quarter of a mile, then stopped. Here he picked up Alaku. They gave each other a brief kiss. Alaku then jumped into the car beside Jagu and braced his rump against the plate; the bubble closed, the car turned around and they sped away.

Alaku unhooked a flask from his belt, unscrewed the top and offered Jagu a drink. Jagu stuck

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his tongue out, signifying a negative reply, so Alaku tipped the bottle to his own lips.

After gulping several times he said, "My parents were after me again to know why I didn't pick a mate-group."

"So?"

"So I suggested that I marry you and Fawani and Tuugee. You should have heard the gasping, the choking, seen the red faces, the bristling tails, the flying fingers. And heard the words! I calmed them down somewhat by telling them that I was only joking, of course. Nevertheless, I had to hear a long and hot lecture on the degeneracy of modern youth, its flippancy, its near-blasphemy. On how humor was a very good thing, but there were some things too sacred to joke about. And so on and on. If the lower classes wanted to forget about clan distinctions and marry just anybody, that was to be expected. What with increasing industrialization, and urbanization, mass migrations, modern mobility and so forth, the proletariat couldn't keep the clan lines straight. And it did not matter with them. But with us jorutama, the aristoi, it mattered very much. Where would society, religion, government, etc., be if the great clans let everything slide into chaos? Especially, if our clan, the Two-Fanged Eagles, set a bad example for the rest? You've heard the same thing."

Jagu sucked his breath inwards sharply with assent, and said, "A million times. Only I'm afraid I shocked my parents even more. Questioning marriage lines is bad enough. But to suggest that belief in ancestral ghosts just might — just barely might — *not* be true, might be a hangover from the old superstitious days... well, you've no idea of outraged parenthood until you've hinted at that. I had to undergo a ceremonial purification — an expensive one for the family and a tiring one for me. Also I had to spend four hours locked up in a cell in the dungeon, and I had to listen to sermons and prayers piped into my cell. No way of turning the abominable stuff off. But the chanting did help me to sleep."

"Poor Jagu," said Alaku, and he patted Jagu's arm.

A few minutes later they hurtled over a hilltop and saw, a mile away at the bottom of the long hill, twin beams of light from a car parked by the roadside.

Jagu pulled up alongside the car. Two got out of it and walked into his Firebird: Fawani and Tuugee. Fawani of the Tree

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Lion clan and Tuugee of the Split-tongue Dragons. All gave each other a kiss. Then, Jagu drove back to the highway and, in a short time, had it whistling at full speed.

"Where are we meeting tonight?" said Tuugee. "I didn't get the message until late. Fawani phoned, but I had to make small talk and avoid saying anything about tonight. I think my parents are monitoring my calls. The Dragons have always had a reputation for excessive suspiciousness. In this case, they've good reason to be — though I hope they don't know it."

"We're going to the Siikii Monument tonight," said Jagu.

The others gasped. "You mean where the great battle was fought?" said Alaku. "Where our ancestors who fell in that battle are buried? Where. . ."

"Where the ghosts congregate every night and slay those who dare walk among them?" said Jagu.

"But that's asking for it!" said Fawani.

"So we ask for it," said Jagu. "You don't really believe in all that tripe? Or do you? If so, you'd better get out now. Go home, ask at once for a ritual cleansing, take your beating. What we've done so far has been enough to stir up the ghosts — if any exist."

There was silence for a moment. Then Fawani said, "Pass the bottle, Alaku. I'll drink to defiance to the ghosts and to our everlasting love."

Jagu's laugh was hollow. He said, "A good toast, Fawani. But you'd better drink one to Waatii, the Hero of Speed. We're going to need his blessing, if he exists. Here comes a cop!"

The others turned to see what Jagu had detected in his rear-view mirror. About a mile behind them, a yellow light was flashing off and on. Jagu flicked on a switch which brought in outside noises and turned the amplifier control. Now they could hear the barking of the highway patrolman's siren.

"One more ticket, and my parents will take the Firebird away from me," said Jagu. "Hang on."

He pressed a button. A light on the instrument panel lit up to indicate that shields were being lowered over the license plates.

He took the Firebird around a passenger vehicle, his horn blaring, while the approaching beams of another grew larger and larger. Just before collision seemed imminent, while the others in his car had broken into terrified calls to the ghosts of their ancestors to save them, he whipped in front of the car just

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passed. The cry of tires burning on the pavement came to them, and the gabble of the car they had just missed ramming keened away.

His passengers said nothing; they were too frightened to protest. Besides, they knew that Jagu would pay no attention to them. He would kill them and himself rather than allow them to be caught. And actually it was better to die than be exposed to a public scandal, the recriminations of their parents and the ritual cleansing.

Jagu drove for half a mile and overtook a lumbering semi-trailer. He could not pass on the left, for a string of twin beams, too near, told him that he would have to wait. If he did, the patrolman would be on them. So he passed on the right, on the shoulder of the road. Without slowing.

Fortunately the shoulder was comparatively smooth and wide. Just wide enough for the Firebird; an inch away from the right wheels, the shoulder fell off and began to slope ever more towards the perpendicular. At the bottom of the hill was a creek, silvery in the moonlight. It ran along a heavily wooded slope.

Alaku, looking out the bubble at the nearness of the hill, groaned. Then he lifted the bottle to his lips again. By the time he had taken a few deep swallows, Jagu had pulled around the truck.

Fawani, looking behind him, saw the patrol car pull up behind the truck. Then one beam appeared as the car began to make the same maneuver as Jagu's. But it disappeared; the cop had changed his mind and swung in behind the truck.

"He'll radio ahead," said Fawani. "Do you mean to crash a roadblock?"

"If I have to," said Jagu cheerily. "But the entrance to the Siikii Monument is only a half mile down the road."

"The cop'll know where we turned in," said Alaku.

Jagu switched off the lights, and they sped at 135 mph along the moonlit highway. He began to slow after a few seconds, but they were still traveling at 60 mph when he took the sideroad.

For a moment, all were sure that they were going to overturn — all except Jagu. He had practiced making this turn at least twenty times, and he knew exactly what he could do. He skidded, but he brought the Firebird out of it just in time to keep the rear from sideswiping a large tree. Then he was back on the road and building up speed on the narrow, tree-lined pavement.

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This time he stopped accelerating at 90 mph and drove for a half mile, taking the twists and turns with the ease of much practice and familiarity with this road.

Suddenly he began slowing the car.

In another half mile, he had turned off the road and plunged into what looked to the others like a solid mass of trees. But there was a space between the trees, an aisle just wide enough for the Firebird to pass through without scraping the paint off the sides. And at the end of the dark aisle, another which turned at a forty-five degree angle. Jagu drove the car into the space there and turned off the power.

They sat there, breathing heavily, looking off through the trees.

From here they could not see the road itself, but they could see the flashing yellow of the patrol car as it sped down the road toward the Siikii Monument.

"Isn't there danger he'll see the others there?" said Fawani.

"Not if they hid their cars like I told them to," said Jagu. He released the bubble, lifted it and jumped out of the car. Raising the trunk cover in the rear of the car, he said, "Give me a hand. I've got something to fool him when he comes back looking for our tracks on the roadside."

They climbed out and helped him lift a tightly rolled mass of green stuff. Under his orders, they carried it back to the point on the road at which they had turned off. After unrolling the stuff, they spread it out over the car tracks and smoothed it.

When they were done the area looked like smooth grass. There were even a few wild flowers — or what looked like wild flowers — sprouting up here and there among the grasses. Presently, from their hiding places behind trees, they saw the patrol car moving slowly back, its searchlight probing along the dirt and grass beside the pavement.

It passed, and soon they could see its lights no more.

Jagu gave the word, and they rolled the counterfeit grass into a tight bundle. Jagu had driven the car backward to the roadside while they were doing that. They placed the roll in the trunk, climbed back in, and Jagu drove off toward the Monument.

As they went along the twisting road, Fawani said, "If we hadn't been driving too fast, we could have avoided all this."

"And missed a lot of fun," said Jagu.

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"The rest of you still don't understand," said Alaku. "Jagu doesn't care if we live or die. In fact, I sometimes think he'd just as soon die. Then his problems — and ours — would be over. Besides, he wants to make some sort of gesture at our parents and the society they represent — even if it's only outrunning a cop."

"Alaku's the cool, objective one," said Jagu. "He sits to one side and dissects the situation and the people involved. But, despite his often correct analysis, he never does anything about it. The Eternal Spectator."

"I'm not a leader," said Alaku somewhat coldly. "But I can take as much action as the next person. So far, I've participated quite fully. Have I ever failed to follow you?"

"No," said Jagu. "I apologize. I spoke from the back of my head. You know me; always too impulsive."

"No apology needed," said Alaku, his voice warming.

III

Then they were at the gateway to the Siikii Monument. Jagu drove the car past it and under some trees across the road. Other vehicles were parked there. "All seven here," he said.

They recrossed the road to a point about forty yards south of the main gate. Jagu called softly. A voice replied softly; and a moment later a flexible plastic rope was thrown over the gate.

Jagu was pulled up the twenty-feet high stone wall first, with much difficulty because of the leocentauroid construction of his body. On the other side, he found Ponu of the Greentail Shrike clan waiting for him. They embraced.

After the others had descended and the rope was pulled back over the wall, they walked softly toward the assignation point. The stone statues of their great and glorious ancestors stared down at them. These were dedicated to the fallen of the Battle of Siikii, the last major conflict of the last civil war of their nation. That had occurred one hundred and twenty years before, and the ancestors of some of those assembled tonight had fought and slain each other then. It was this war that had killed off so many of the aristoi that the lower classes had been able to demand certain rights and privileges denied them. It was also this war that had accelerated the growth of the fledgling Industrial Age.

The youths walked past the frowning Heroes and the pillars that marked various heroic ex-

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ploits during the battle. All but Juga showed a restraint in the overwhelming presence of the heads. He chattered away in a low but confident voice. Before they had reached the center of the Monument, the others were also talking and even laughing.

Here, in the center, where the battle had been decided, was the most sacred of all sites in this area. Here was the colossal statue of *Joma,* the eponymous ancestor of the joma species.

The statue was carved out of a single mass of diorite and painted with colors that imitated those of the living joma. It had no upper torso nor arms, only the head and neck attached to the quadrupedal body. The holy scriptures of the joma, the *Book of Mako,* said that Joma had once been like his descendants. But in return for the power of sentience and for the privilege of seeing his young become the dominant species of this world, and eventually of the universe, he had surrendered his arms, become like a crippled beast. Pleased by this sacrifice, Tuu-God had allowed Joma to reproduce parthenogenetically, without the aid of the other three mates. (Since Joma was the surviving member of his kind after Tuu had, in a fit of righteous anger, killed most beings, Joma had no other partners.)

It was here that Jagu had decided to hold the love feast. He could not have picked a place more appropriate to show his contempt for the ghosts and for the beliefs that the entire population of the planet held sacred.

Jagu and his friends greeted those waiting for them. Drinks were passed around along with jests. Ponu was that night's administrator. He had spread the carpets and placed the food and drinks on them — eight carpets, and four joruma sat on each.

As the night passed, and the moon reached its zenith and began to sink, the talking and laughing became louder and thicker. Then Jagu took a large bottle from Ponu, unscrewed the cap and went among the group. He gave each one a large pill from the bottle. Each swallowed it under his watchful eye. They made faces of repulsion, and Fawani almost threw his up. But he managed to keep it down when Jagu threatened to ram it down with his paw if Fawani didn't do the job himself.

After that Jagu made a mock prayer to Mako, a parody of the one that newly married quartets made to their particular household clan-Hero of Fertility. He ended by taking a swig from a bottle of wine and then smashing the bottle against the face of Joma.

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An hour later the first round of the love feast had been completed. The participants were resting, getting ready for the next round, and discussing the beauty and the minor disappointments of the last congress.

A whistle blew shrilly.

Jagu sprang to his feet. "The cops!" he said. "All right, everybody, don't panic! Get your headpieces and breastplates. Don't bother to put them on yet. Leave the carpets here; they haven't got any clan insignias on them. Follow me!"

The statue of Joma stood on a small hill in the center of the Monument. It was this advantage in viewing that had determined Jagu's choice of site, in addition to his purpose in making the greatest blasphemy of all. He could see that the main gateway was open, and several cars with beams burning had just come through it. There were three other gates; all but one was also open and cars coming through them. Probably, he thought, that gate had been left closed to lure them toward it. Once over it, they would find the police waiting for them beside the wall.

But if this were a trap, then the police would have observed them hide their cars in the brush. That meant that even if he and his friends eluded the cops, they would all have a long long walk home. A useless walk, because the police would have no trouble determining and finding the owners.

There was a chance that this was not a prepared ambush. The patrolman who had chased them might have been suspicious and brought back other police. They could have climbed the walls, seen the group under Joma and decided to swoop in now. If so, it was also possible that they did not have enough personnel to come in through all the gates.

The unguarded fourth gate could be an escape route.

Almost he decided to make a run for the closed gate. But if he did so, and he was wrong, he would lead his friends to ruin. Whereas he had prepared some time ago a hiding place within the Monument grounds itself.

It would be foolish to take a chance on an unknown when he had something that was nearly one hundred per cent sure.

"Follow me to Ngiizaa!" he said. "Run, but don't panic. If anyone falls or gets into difficulty, call out. We'll stop to help you."

He began running; behind him was the thud of paws and the harsh breathing of stress.

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They went down the hill on the side opposite the main gateway and toward the granite statue of the Hero Ngiizaa. Jagu looked around and noted that the other statues should hide them from the approaching policemen. He had chosen Ngiizaa because there was a ring of statues around it, marking where Ngiizaa had fallen inside a pile of his enemy's bodies. It took sixty seconds to get there from the center of the Monument, plenty of time to open the trapdoor at the base of Ngiizaa and for all of them to crowd into the hole beneath.

Over a year ago, Jagu and some of the others, working on moonless or cloudy nights, had dug out the hole. Then they had placed the beams which supported the trapdoor and put sod over it. The trapdoor was solid; he and five others had stood on it to test its weight and make sure that, on the days when crowds came to visit, the door would not betray its presence by bending.

Now he and three others began rolling the sod back. The strip was narrow; it did not take long to do the job. Then, while he held the door up, the others jumped into the hole beneath and went to the back of the hole to make room for those following.

By the time all except himself were in, the police cars had reached the center. Their searchlights began probing the Monument.

He had to drop down and lie motionless while several beams in turn sprayed the circle of statues. When they had passed he leaped up. Alaku, below, held the trapdoor up just far enough for him to squeeze through. He had replaced the sod on top of it.

This was the ticklish part of the whole procedure. No one could be left above to smooth the sod and make sure that the ragged edges did not show. But he did not think that the police could conceive of such a hiding place. When they started to make a search on paw, using their flashlights, they would expect to flush out the members of the party from behind individual statues. Their lights would play swiftly over the grass; they would be looking for youths lying flat on the grass, not for hidden trapdoors.

It was hot and crowded in the hole. Jagu hoped they would not have to wait too long. Zotu had a mild case of claustrophobia. If he started to panic, he'd have to be knocked out for the good of everybody.

The luminous face of his wristwatch showed 15:32. He'd give

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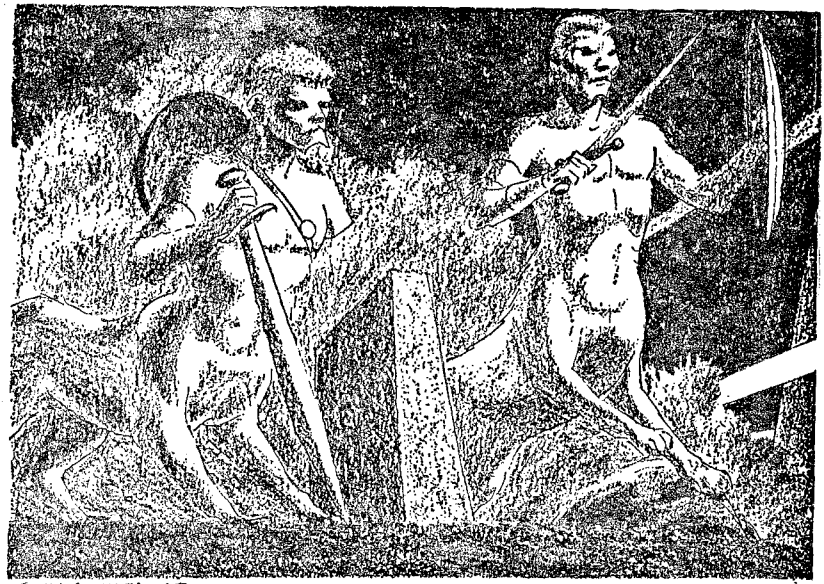

the cops an hour to search before deciding that the party had somehow gotten over the wall and away. After that, he would lead his friends out of the hole. If the police had not left somebody to watch the road, or if they did not make a determined search of the woods nearby and found the hidden cars, then all would go well. Many ifs . . . but it was exciting.

A few minutes later, somebody stepped hard on the trapdoor.

Jagu suppressed a groan. If the cop heard the hollow sound . . . but that was unlikely. They should be shouting at each other.

There was another rap as if somebody were stomping his feet on the trapdoor. Then, while he held his breath and hoped the others would not cough or make any other noise, he heard something grate against wood.

The next moment, the door swung up slowly. A harsh voice said. "All right boys. The game's up. Come on out. Don't try anything. We'll shoot you."

IV

Later, in the cell, when he had time to think, Jagu wished that he had resisted. How much better to have been killed than to go through this!

He was in a small cell and

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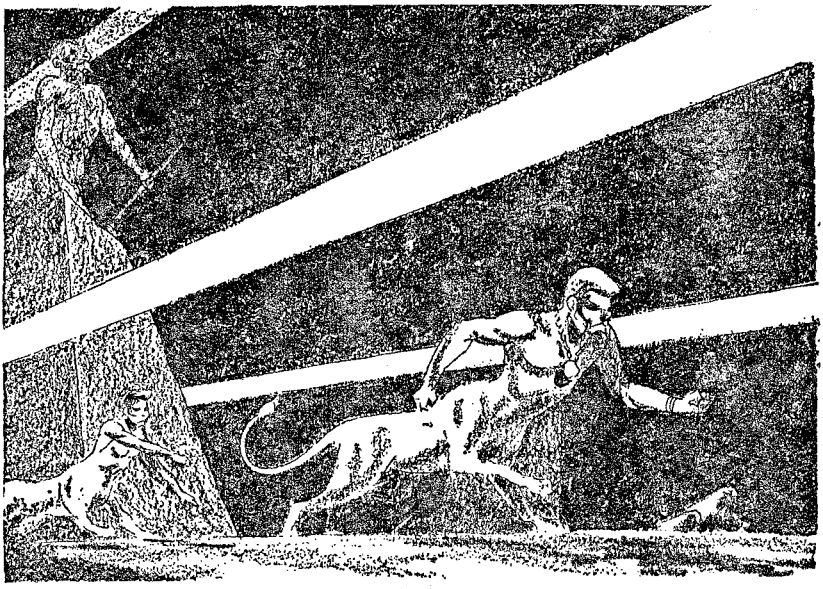

alone. He had been there for he did not know how long. There were no windows, his watch had been taken away and he had no one to talk to.

Three meals were given to him through a little swinging door at the bottom of the large door. The tray was bolted to the door, and the food was placed in depressions. There was no cutlery; he had to eat with his fingers. Fifteen minutes after the tray swung inwards, it began to withdraw. No amount of tugging on his part could keep it from moving.

The cell itself was furnished simply. The bed was bolted to the floor and without blankets or pillows. There was a washbowl and an airblower with which to dry himself, and a hole in the floor to receive refuse. The walls were padded. He could not commit suicide if he wished to.

Sometime after the third meal, while he paced back and forth and wondered what punishment he would have to endure, what his companions were going through, what his parents knew and felt, the door opened.

It did so silently; he was not aware of it until he turned to pace back toward it. Two soldiers — not police — entered. Silently they escorted him out of the cell.

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Neither were armed, but he had the feeling that they knew all about bare-hand-and-paw-fighting, that they were experienced and that he would get badly hurt if he tried to attack them. He had no such intention. Not until he saw his way clear, anyway. As long as he was inside a building new to him, one that must be equipped with closed-circuit TV and electronic beams, he would be quiet.

Meanwhile...

He was taken down a long corridor and into an elevator.

The elevator was some time rising, but he had no way of telling how many stories they had gone up. Then it stopped, and he was taken down another long hall and then another. Finally they stopped before a door on which was incised, in the florid syllabary of a century ago, *Tagimi Tiipaaroozuu.* Head of Criminal Detection. Arigi, the man responsible for detection and arrest of criminals of stature, conducted his business here. Jagu knew him, for Arigi had been among the elders present at his Initiation. He was a fellow clansman.

Though Jagu's knees shook, he swore he would show no fear. When he was marched in, he knew that he would have to remind himself constantly that he was not afraid. Arigi sat on his haunches behind a huge crescent-shaped desk of polished *bini* wood. He had a cold hard face that was made even more unreadable by the dark glasses he wore. On his head was the four-cornered tall-crowned hat of the High Police. His arms were covered with bracelets, most of which had been awarded him by the government for various services. In his right hand was a stiletto with a jeweled handle.

"It may interest you, fledgling," he said in a dry voice, pointing the stiletto at Jagu, "that you are the first of your fellows to be interviewed. The rest are still in their cells, wondering when the trial will commence.

"Tell me," he said so sharply that Jagu could not help flinching, "when did you first decide that the ghosts of your ancestors did not exist? Except as a primitive superstition, figments in the minds of fools?"

Jagu had decided not to deny any accusation that was true. If he were to suffer, so much the worse. But he would not degrade himself by lying or pleading.

"I've always thought so," he said. "When I was a child I may have believed in the existence of the spirits of my ancestors. But I do not remember it.

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"And you were intelligent enough not to proclaim this disbelief publicly," said Arigi. He seemed to relax a trifle. But Jagu was sure that Arigi was hoping he too, would relax so that he could spring at him, catch him off guard.

He wondered if his words were being recorded, his image being shown on a screen to his judges. He doubted that his trial for blasphemy would be made public. It would reflect too much discredit and dishonor on his clan, and they were powerful enough to suppress these things. Perhaps they might even have him in here merely to scare him, to make him repent. Then he would be let off with a reprimand or, more likely, be assigned to a desk job. Forever earthbound.

But no, blasphemy was not merely a crime against the people of this planet. It was a spit in the face of his ancestors. Only pain and blood could wipe out that insult; the ghosts would crowd around him while he screamed over a fire and would lap at the blood flowing from his wounds.

Arigi smiled as if he now had Jagu where he wanted him. He said, "Well, at least you're a cool one. You act as a Wazaga should. So far, anyway. Tell me, do all your friends also deny the existence of an afterlife?"

"You will have to ask them that yourself."

"You mean you do not know what they believe?"

"I mean that I will not betray them."

"But you betrayed them the moment you led them to the Siikii Monument to defile the Heroes with your illicit love-making and your blasphemous prayers," said Arigi. "You betrayed them the moment you first confided to them your doubts and encouraged them to express theirs. You betrayed them when you bought an unlawful contraceptive from criminals and fed it to your comrades before the orgy."

Jagu stiffened. If no one had talked, how did Arigi know all this?

Arigi smiled again, and he said, "You betrayed them more than you know. For instance, the *weefee* pill you gave them tonight had no potency at all. I had already ordered your source of supply to give you a pill that looked like and tasted like *weefee*. But it had no effect. A fourth of your friends must be pregnant right now. Maybe you, too."

Jagu was shaken, but he tried to hide the effect of Arigi's words. He said, "If you've known

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about us for a long time, why didn't you arrest us before?"

Arigi leaned his upper torso back and placed his fingers behind his head. He looked at a point above Jagu, as if his thoughts were there. He said slowly, and it seemed irrelevantly, "So far, we joruma have discovered exactly fifty-one planets which can support our type of life. Fifty-one out of an estimated 300,000 in this galaxy alone. Of the ones discovered — all found in the last twenty-five years — twelve were inhabited by a centauroid type of sentient, similar to us, five by a bipedal type, six by very weird sentients indeed. All of these intelligent beings are bisexual or, I should say, have a sexual bipolarity.

"None of them have our quadrupolar sexual makeup. If we extrapolate on what we have so far found, we could say that the centauroid type of body is that most favored by Tuu or, if you prefer, the old pagan Four Parents of Nature. The bipedal form is second. And Tuu alone knows what other exotic beings are scattered throughout the Cosmos.

"We could also speculate that Tuu, for some reason, has favored us with a monopoly on the quadrupolar method of reproduction. At least, we joruma are the only ones encountered so far with that method. Now, what does that suggest to you?"

V

Jagu was puzzled. This inquisition was not going on the lines he had anticipated. He was not getting a thundering denunciation, a blistering lecture, threats of physical and mental punishment, of death.

What was Arigi leading up to? Perhaps this line of conversation was intended to make him think that he was going to escape. Then Arigi would attack savagely when his defenses were lowered.

"The Book of Mako says that a joma is unique in this universe. That the joruma are fashioned in the shape of Tuu. No other creature in all the world — so said Mako — is favored of Tuu. We are chosen by him to conquer the Cosmos."

"So said Mako," replied Arigi. "Or whoever wrote the book which is supposed to be written by Mako. But I want to know what you think."

Now Jagu thought he knew what Arigi was trying to do to him. He was talking thus, leading him, so he could get him to admit his disbelief. Then Arigi would spring.

But why should Arigi bother? He had all the evidence.

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"What do I think?" said Jagu. "I think it rather strange that Tuu should have made so many differing sentient beings — that is, those intelligent enough to have language and to have a word for God in their languages — but only make one in Tuu's image. If he wanted all the planets to be eventually populated by the joruma, why did he create other beings on these planets? All of whom, by the way, think they have been formed in their Maker's image."

The two pairs of Arigi's eyelids had moved inwards so that only a sliver of pale green showed between them. He said, "You know that what you have said is enough to condemn you? That if I submit the evidence to the judges, you could be slowly burned alive? It's true that most blasphemers are killed quickly by being thrown into an intense furnace. But the law still stands. I would be within legal rights if I had you toasted so slowly that it would take you twelve hours or more to die."

"I know," said Jagu. "I had my fun with my friends; I spat at the ghosts. Now I have to pay."

Again Arigi seemed to start talking without relevance to the issue.

"Before Mako died, he said that his ghost would go forth through the cosmos, and he would place on other worlds a sign that the world was to be the possession of the joruma. Now, this took place 2500 years before space travel. Such a thing was not even dreamed of in his time.

"Yet when we reached the first inhabitable world, we found the sign he promised to leave behind him: The stone statue of Joma, our ancestor. It was carved by Mako to show that he had been there and had staked out this world for the faithful, for the joruma; and five others of the fifty-five so far found have thereon a giant stone statue of Joma.

"Tell me, how do you account for that?"

Jagu said, slowly, "Either Mako's ghost carved the image of Joma out of the native stone, or..."

He paused.

"Or what?"

Jagu opened his mouth, but the words came hard. He swallowed and forced them out.

"Or our spacemen carved those statues themselves," he said.

Arigi's reaction was not what Jagu had expected. Arigi laughed loudly until his face was red. Finally, wheezing, wiping his eyes with a handkerchief, he said, "So! You guessed it! I won-

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der how many others have? And like you are keeping silent because of fear?"

He blew his nose and then continued, "Not many, I suppose. There are not too many born sceptics such as yourself. Or many as intelligent."

He looked curiously at Jagu. "You aren't happy to find yourself right? What's the matter?"

"I don't know. Maybe, though I disbelieved, I'd always hoped that my faith could be re-established. How much easier for me if it could be! If our spaceships had found the statues of Mako waiting for them, I'd have no choice but to believe..."

"No, you wouldn't," said Arigi sharply.

Jagu stared. "I wouldn't?"

"No! If all the evidence pointed toward the reality of Mako as a ghost, if the evidence were overwhelming, you still would not have believed. You would have found some rationalization for your disbelief. You would have said that the correct explanation or interpretation just wasn't available. And you would have continued to reject the idea of the ghost."

"Why?" said Jagu. "I'm a reasonable person; I'm rational. I think scientifically."

"Oh, sure," said Arigi. "But you were born an agnostic, a sceptic. You had the temperament of the disbeliever in the womb. Only by a violent perversion of your innate character could you have accepted religion. Most people are born believers; some are not. It's that simple."

"You mean," said Jagu, "that reality doesn't have a thing to do with it? That I think as I do, not because I have reasoned my way through the dark labyrinth of religion, but because my temperament made me think so?"

"That's an accurate statement."

"But — but—" said Jagu, "what you're saying is that there is no Truth! That the most ignorant peasant and fervent believer of ghosts has as much basis to his claims as I have to mine."

"Truth? There are truths and truths. You fall off a high cliff, and you accelerate at such and such a velocity until you hit the ground. Water, if not dammed, flows, downward. These are truths no one argues about. Temperament does not matter in physical matters. But in the realm of metaphysics, truth is an affair of natal prejudice. That is all."

Jagu had not been shaken by the thought of the fire and he death that waited for him. Now he was trembling, and out-

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raged. Later he would be depressed. Arigi's cynicism made his look like a child's.

Arigi said, "The enlightened members—pardon me—the born sceptics of the aristoi have not believed in the existence of ghosts for some time. In a land crowded with the granite images of their illustrious ancestors, and crowded with worshippers of these sculptured stones, we laugh. But silently. Or only among ourselves. Many of us even doubt the existence of God.

"But we aren't fools. We suppress any show of public scepticism. After all, the fabric of our society is woven from the threads of our religion. It's an excellent means for keeping the people in line or for justifying our rule over them.

"Now, haven't you detected a certain pattern in the finding of the statues of Mako on the interstellar planes? In the particular type of planet on which the statues are?"

Jagu spoke slowly to control the shakiness of his voice.

"The images are not found on those planets populated by sentients technologically equal to us. Only on those planets with no sentients or with sentients having an inferior technology."

"Very good!" said Arigi. "You can see that that is no coincidence. We aren't about to wage war on beings who are able to retaliate effectively. Not yet, anyway. Now, I'll tell you why I revealed this to you — rather, confirmed your suspicions. Ever since we have had a faster-than-light drive, our interstellar exploratory ships have been manned with crews of a certain type. All are aristocrats, and all are disbelievers. They have had no compunction about chiseling statues out of the native rock on the appropriate planets."

"Why do they have to do this?" said Jagu.

"To establish a principle. To justify us. Some day, another sentient of equal, maybe superior, technological development will try to claim one of our planets for its own. When that day comes, we want our warriors and the people at home to be fired with a religious frenzy.

"You want me and my comrades to do this work for you?"

"For yourselves, too," said Arigi. "You young ones will have to take the reins of government after we're dead. And there's another factor. We're recruiting you because we need replacements. This is dangerous work. Every now and then, a ship is lost. Just lost. Leaves port and is never heard of again. We need new interstellar spacers. We need you and your friends now. What do you say?"

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"Is there a choice?" asked Jagu. "If we turn down your offer, what happens to us?"

"An accident," said Arigi. "We can't have a trial and execution. Not even in secret. Too much chance of dishonoring ancient and honorable clans.

"Very well. I accept. I can't speak *for* my friends, but I'll speak *to* them."

"I'm sure they'll see the light," said Arigi dryly.

VI

A few days later, Jagu flew to the school for advanced space-navy officers.

He and his friends began to take numerous training trips on ships that operated within the confines of the solar system. A year passed, and then they made three trips to nearby planetary systems under the tutelage of veterans. On the final voyage and the combat exercises that went with it, the veterans acted only as observers.

There was another ceremony. A new interstellar destroyer was commissioned and christened the *Paajaa,* and Jagu was given a captain's redstone to wear on the brim of his hat. The rest of the group also got various insignias of lesser ranks, for the craft was to be manned entirely by them.

Before leaving on the maiden voyage of the *Paajaa,* Jagu was summoned for one more interview with Arigi. By now Jagu knew that Arigi held more power than the public guessed. He was not only head of the planetary police system, he also was responsible for all military security systems.

Arigi welcomed Jagu as a member of the inner circle. He asked him to sit down and gave him a glass of *kusuto.* It was vintage of the best, thirty years old.

"You have added honor and luster to our clan," said Arigi. "The Wazaga can be proud of you. You were not given the captainship merely because you are a Wazaga, you know. A stellar ship is too expensive and important to be entrusted to a youth whose main ability is affiliation with a ruling group. You are a captain because you deserve the rank."

He sniffed at the bouquet of the wine and took a small sip.

Then he put the glass down, squinted at Jagu and said, "In a few days you will receive official orders to make your first exploratory voyage. Your ship will have enough fuel and supplies for a four-year trip, but you will be ordered to return at the end of two and a half, circumstances permitting. During that one and a quarter year,

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you will try to locate inhabitable planets. If any planet has sentients with a technology with space travel restricted to its system and atomic power, you will note its present development and its potential resistance to future attack by us. If the sentients have interstellar travel, you will observe as much as possible but will not place your ship in danger of attack. And you will return, after making the observations, directly and at full speed to us.

If the sentients have an inferior technology, you will locate a site easily observable from orbit and will erect or carve an image of Mako there.

"Now! By the time you will have returned, many more eggs will have been hatched here. There will be a larger proportion of natal disbelievers among them than in the few years previously. By the time you are my age, the number of disbelievers will be a great problem. There will be strife, changing mores, doubt, perhaps even bloodshed. Before this occurs, before the change of *Zeitgeist* is on the side of the disbelievers and the faith in the Heroes and in Mako declines, we will have settled colonies on various planets uninhabited by sentients. We will also have wiped out or reduced greatly in number those sentients inferior to us. We will have started populating these with our kind. Because of our method of reproduction, we can populate a planet faster than any other sentient. And that is well, since we will need these colonies to aid us in the wars that will come.

"It is inevitable that we will have to fight cultures equal or perhaps even superior to ours. When that comes, we will have established the pattern — that we have a spiritual right to take anything we want. By then the weakened belief in the religion of our fathers will not affect our fighting zeal. We will be replacing it with another belief. Our right to conquest.

"Meanwhile, of course, I will be doing my best to suppress any resistance to our official religion. Those infidels among the aristoi will be indoctrinated in in the proper attitude: a conscious hypocrisy. Those who nobly refuse will be dealt with in one way or another. The disbelievers among the lower classes will also be eliminated. They will be branded as criminals.

"But, of course, they can only fight the *Zeitgeist* so long. Then it takes over. By that time, I will have joined my ancestors, and my work will be done."

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He smiled wryly and said, "I will be a ghost, perhaps, with a statue erected to me. However, by then my descendants—except for the inevitable ultrareactionaries — will regard my shrine as a historical or anthropological curiosity. I will have to go hungry among the other hungry ghosts — unhonored, unfed, wailing with weakness and impotent anger."

Jagu wondered if Arigi did not more than half-mean those words. He also wondered if Arigi was not as self-deceiving as those he laughed at. He was making his own, personal mythology to replace the old.

After all, what evidence did he really have to support his thesis that believers were born, not made?

A week later, he was on the Paajaa and had given the order to take it off. Another week, and his natal star was only one among many, a tiny glow. He was headed for the faroff and the unknown.

A year later, thirty stars later, they found two inhabitable planets. The second, like the first, rotated around a star of the Ao-U type. Unlike the first, it was the third planet from the star and it had sentients.

The *Paajaa* went into orbit in the upper atmosphere, and the telescopes were turned on the surface. The powers of magnification of the telescopes were so great that the spacers could see as distinctly as if they had been poised only twenty feet above the ground.

The sentients were bipedal and comparatively hairless except for thick growths on their heads or, among the males, on the faces. The majority covered their bodies with a variety of garments. Like the joruma, their skin colors and hair types varied; the darker ones were mainly in the equatorial zone.

Thousands of photographs were made during the orbitings of the *Paajaa*. Those taken of the groups that wore little or no clothing made it evident that these bipedals had only two sexes.

Another fact was determined. These sentients had no technology to be compared to the joruma's. They did not even have aircraft, except for a few balloons. Their main propulsive power was the steam engine. Steam drove engines of iron on iron tracks and paddlewheels or screws on ships. There were many sailships, also. The most formidable weapons were cannons and simple breech-loading rifles.

The aborigines were roughly at about the same stage the

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joruma had been about a century and a half ago.

VII

On their three hundredth orbit, Alaku made a shattering discovery.

He was looking at the scene projected on a large screen by a telescope when he cried out loudly. Those nearby came running, and they stopped when they saw what he was staring at. They too cried out.

By the time Jagu arrived, the scene was out of the telescope's reach. But he listended to their descriptions, and he ordered that the photos made be brought to him at once.

He looked at the photos, and he said, keeping his face immobile so that the others could not understand how shocked he was, "We'll have to go down and see for ourselves."

Four of them went down on the launch while the ship, in stationary orbit, stayed overhead. Their destination was on a rocky plateau about five miles southeast of the nearest city. The city was on the west bank of a great river that created a ribbon of greenery in the middle of the desert that covered much of the northern half of the continent. It was night, but a full moon shone in a cloudless sky. It illuminated brightly the three huge pyramids of stone and the object that had upset the crew of the Paajaa so much.

This lay in the center of a large quarry.

Ofter hiding their ship in a deep and narrow ravine, the four proceeded in a small halftrack. A minute later, Jagu halted it, and all got out to look.

There was silence for a while. Then Jagu, speaking slowly as if hesitant to commit himself, said, "It seems to be Joma."

"It's ancient," said Alaku. "Very ancient. If Mako made this, he must have done so immediately after dying. He must have come straight here."

"Don't jump to conclusions," said Jagu. "I was going to say that another ship had gotten here before us. But we know no ship has been sent to this sector. However..."

"However what?" said Alaku.

"As you said, it's ancient. Look at the ripples in the stone. They must have been made by erosion from blowing sand. Look at the face. It's shattered. Still, the natives of long ago could have made this. It's very possible."

Silent again, they re-entered the halftrack and began to drive slowly around the enormous statue.

"It faces the east," said Alaku.

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"Just as Mako said the statues of Joma would."

"Many primitive sentients on many worlds face their gods, their temples and their dead towards the east," said Jagu. "It's natural to regard the rising sun as the recurrent symbol of immortality."

Fawani said, "This may be the biggest reproduction of Joma. But it's not the only one on this world. The photos showed others. They too must be ancient. Perhaps it's only coincidence. The natives themselves made them. They're figures, symbols of their religion."

"Or," said Alaku, "the natives founded a religion that was based on Joma after Mako came here and carved this statue out of the rock. He may even have given them our religion. So, as you saw, they set up a temple before Joma. I'm sure that's what the ruins in front of the breasts were. They made other smaller images of Joma. Then ages later they ceased to believe in Joma . . . just as we are ceasing to believe. Yet the testimony to the truth was before their mocking eyes. . ."

Jagu knew they could not determine the truth no matter how long they speculated among themselves. The thing to do was to locate somebody who did know.

He turned the halftrack towards the city.

There were isolated houses on its outskirts. Before he had gone a mile, he found what he was looking for. A party of natives were headed towards him. All were riding beasts that looked very much like the *gapo* of the deserts of his own planet, except that these had only four legs and one hump.

The gapoids scattered in a panic; some threw their riders. The joruma shot these with gas-driven darts, the tips of which were coated with a paralyzing drug. After tearing the robes from his victims to make sure he had a specimen of each sex (for he knew that the zoologists at home would want to examine them) the joruma chose a male and a female. These were loaded into the halftrack, which then returned to the launch. In a few minutes, the launch was rising towards the *Paajaa*.

Back on the ship, the sleepers were placed on beds within a locked room. Jagu inspected them and, for the thousandth time, wondered if the joruma were not designed by Tuu to be superior. Perhaps they were really made in Tuu's image. These bipedals seemed to be so scrawny and weak and so inefficient, sexually speaking. One sex could never hatch an egg or

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bear young. This fault halved the species' chances of reproducing. Moreover, he thought, preserving humor even in his semi-stunned condition, it cut out three-quarters of the fun.

Maybe the other sentients were, as some theologians had theorized, experiments on Tuu's part. Or maybe Tuu had meant for non-joruma to be inferior.

Let the theologians speculate. He had a far more important and immediate enigma to solve. Also he had Alaku to worry about.

Alaku, the cool one, he whose only permanent passion was intellectualism, the agnostic, was by far the most shaken.

Jagu remembered Arigi's words. You believe what you want to believe. The metaphysical cannot be denied or affirmed in terms of the physical.

"It's a judgment," said Alaku. "We thought we were so clever and our fathers so ignorant and superstitious. But Mako knew that some day we would come here and find the truth. He knew it before our great-great-great-great-grandfathers were born."

"We have two natives," said Jagu. "We'll learn their language. From them we may discover who did carve out Joma — I mean that statue that seems to resemble Joma."

"How will they know?" said Alaku, looking desperate. "They will have only the words of their ancestors as testimony, just as we have the words of ours."

This was the last time Jagu talked to Alaku.

Shortly thereafter, Alaku failed to appear for his turn of duty on the bridge. Jagu called him over the intercom. Receiving no answer, he went to Alaku's cabin. The door was locked, but it yielded to the master key. Alaku lay on the floor, his skin blue from cyanide.

He left no note behind. None was needed.

The entire crew was saddened and depressed. Alaku, despite a certain aloofness, had been loved. The many eggs he had fathered in them, and the eggs

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they had fathered in him, were in the cryogenic tank, waiting to be quick-thawed when they returned to their home.

A few hours later, the two natives killed each other. The bigger one strangled the other. But before that the veins of the strangler's wrists had been bitten into and opened by the other. After the smaller had died, the other had exercised violently to stimulate the bleeding.

Almost, Jagu decided to turn around and capture some more sentients from the same area. But he could not force himself to do that. To return and see Joma again, the awe-inspiring ancient being of stone ... who knew but what more might go mad? He could be among them.

For several ship-days, he paced back and forth on the bridge. Or he lay in his bed in his cabin, staring at the bulkhead.

Finally, one third-watch, Jagu went onto the bridge. Fawani, the closest of all to him, was also on the bridge, carrying out his slight duties as pilot. He did not seem surprised to see Jagu; Jagu often came here when he was supposed to be sleeping.

"It has been a long time since we were together," said Fawani. "The statue on that Tuu-forsaken planet and Alaku's suicide ... they have killed love. They have killed everything except wonder about one question."

"I don't wonder. I *know* that it was made by the natives. I know because that's the only way it could be."

"But there's no way of proving it, is there?" said Fawani.

"No," replied Jagu. "So before we get back home, long before, we must make up our minds to act."

"What do you mean?"

"We have several avenues of action. One, report exactly what we have seen. Let the authorities do the thinking for us, let them decide what to do. Two, forget about having discovered the second planet. Report only the first planet. Three, don't go home. Find a planet suitable for colonization, one so far away it may not be found by other joruma ships for hundreds of years, maybe longer.

All three are dangerous," continued Jagu. "You don't know Arigi as I do. He will refuse to believe in the coincidence because the mathematical chances against it are too high. He will also refuse to believe that Mako did it. He will conclude that we made those statues to perpetrate a monstrous hoax."

"But how could he believe such a thing?"

"I couldn't blame him," said Jagu, "because he knows our

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past record. He might think that we did it just to raise hell. Or even that the long voyage unbalanced us, that we became converted, backslid to superstition, committed a pious fraud to convince him and others like him. It doesn't matter. He'll think we did it. He has to think that or admit his whole philosophy of life is wrong.

"If we try to get rid of all evidence, the photos, the logbook, we run a risk of someone talking. I think it'd be a certainty. We belong to the species that can't keep its mouth shut. Or somebody else may go mad and babble the truth.

"Personally I think that we should try the third alternative. Go far out into an unknown sector, so far that we can't return. This will put us beyond the range of any ships now built. If, in the future, one should find us, we can always say we had an accident, that the ship couldn't return."

"But what if we reach the end of our fuel, and we still have found no suitable planet?" said Fawani.

"It's a long chance, but the best we have," said Jagu.

He pointed at the lower left-hand corner of a starmap on a bulkhead. "There are quite a few Ao-U stars there," he said. "If I gave the order to you now, at this moment, to head the ship toward them—would you obey my order?"

"I don't know what to think," said Fawani. "I do know that we could spend the rest of our long voyage home arguing about the best course of action. And still be undecided by the time we let down on earth. I trust you, Jagu, because I believe in you."

"Believe?" said Jagu. He smiled. "Are there also born believers in others? And those men born to be believed in? Perhaps. But what about the rest of the crew? Will they as unhesitatingly follow me?"

"Talk to them," said Fawani. "Tell them what you told me. They will do as I did. I won't even wait for the outcome. I'll turn the ship now. They won't need to know that until after they've decided to do so — provided you talk to them before I'm relieved."

"Very well. Turn it around. Head it in that general direction. We'll pick out a particular star later. We'll find one or die trying. We'll begin life anew. And we don't teach our children anything about the ghosts of long-dead heroes."

"Turn about it is," said Fawani. He busied himself with the controls and with inserting various cards in the computer.

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thing about the ghosts of heroes." Then, he said, "But can man exist in a religious vacuum? What will we tell them to replace the old beliefs?"

"They'll believe what they want to believe," said Jagu wearily. "Anyway, we've a long time to think about that."

He was silent while he looked out at the stars. He thought about the planet they had just left. The sentients there would never know what gratitude they owed to him, Jagu.

If he had returned to base and told his story, the Navy — no matter what happened to Jagu and his crew — would go to that planet. And they would proceed to capture specimens and would determine their reaction to a number of laboratory-created diseases. Within a few years only the naturally resistant of the natives would be left alive. Their planet would be open to colonization by the joruma.

Now the bipedals had a period of grace. If they developed space travel and atomic power soon enough, the next joruma ship would declare them off-limits.

Who knew? His own descendants might regret this decision. Some day, the sons of those sentients who had been spared by his action might come to the very planet on which his, Jagu's, sons would be living. They might even attack and destroy or enslave the joruma.

That was another chance he and his descendants would have to take.

He pressed the button that would awaken the sleepers and summon those on watch. Now he must begin talking.

He knew that they all would be troubled until the day they died. Yet, he swore to himself, their sons would not know of it. They would be free of the past and its doubts and its fears.

They would be free.

— PHILIP JOSE FARMER

FORECAST

Poul Anderson, who seemingly never learned how to write a bad story, gives us a particularly good one next issue. There's all that lunar real estate hanging up there in the sky, you see—but no air, no water, ergo no life. We talk glibly of terraforming it to make lebensraum for Earth's expanding population. But is it going to be as easy as that?

In next issue's complete short novel, *To Build a World*, Anderson gives us the answer to the three big questions of terraforming: How? How much? And—most of all—Over whose dead body?

It's a good one!

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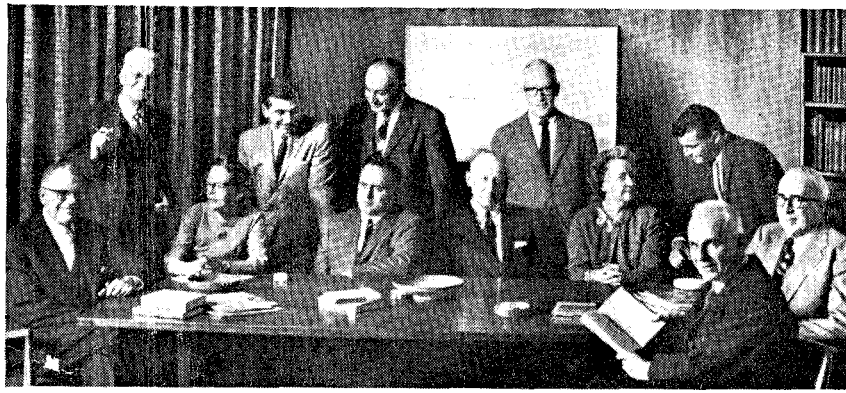

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Standing: Mark Wiseman, Max Shulman, Rudolf Flesch, Red Smith, Rod Serling

Photo by Philippe Halsman

12 famous authors start a new kind of writing school

If you have writing talent worth developing, here's an opportunity never before available:

Twelve of America's most famous authors have created a school of professional writing to help you develop your skill, talent and craftsmanship . . . and to pass on to you their secrets of achieving success and recognition.

This unique home-training program is supervised by Rod Serling, winner of five Emmys for TV writing; Pulitzer Prize historian Bruce Catton; best-selling novelist Faith Baldwin; humorist Max *(Dobie Gillis)* Shulman; publisher-columnist Bennett Cerf; famed sportswriter Red Smith; Rudolf Flesch, top authority on readable writing; noted language expert Prof. Bergen Evans; famous mystery novelist Mignon G. Eberhart; J. D. Ratcliff, called by *Time* "America's No. 1 craftsman in the field of non-fiction"; and top ad men John Caples and Mark Wiseman.

These famous authors have developed a remarkable series of textbooks, lessons and writing assignments that present — in a clear and stimulating way — what they have learned in their long, hard climb to the top.

The School's instructors are themselves professional writers. Under the supervision of the 12 Famous Writers, these instructors work with students by mail, just as magazine and book editors work with many established authors. And they spend up to several hours on each assignment completed by a student . . . revising, correcting, and advising.

The Famous Writers School is less than three years old. Its first students are not due to graduate until later this year. Yet, many have sold their writings to such varied publications as *The Reader's Digest, Redbook, Popular Science, True Story.*

To select people with writing talent worth developing, the 12 Famous Writers have designed a revealing Talent Test. The coupon will bring you a copy, along with a brochure about the School. Your completed Test will be graded without charge or obligation by one of the School's instructors. If your Test indicates writing talent, you are then eligible to enroll in the School. You are, however, under absolutely no obligation to do so.

Famous Writers School
Dept. 6392, Westport, Connecticut

I am interested in finding out whether I have writing talent worth developing. Please mail me, without obligation, the Famous Writers Talent Test.

Mr.
Mrs.....Age.....
Miss
Street.....

City.....Zone.....

County.....State.....

The School is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council.

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